New! #2

Adventures in Science Fiction

THE JUSTICE ISSUE

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SFX

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X-APPEAL: GILLIAN ANDERSON SPEAKS!

SHARK ATTACK! PROTEUS ON-SET REPORT

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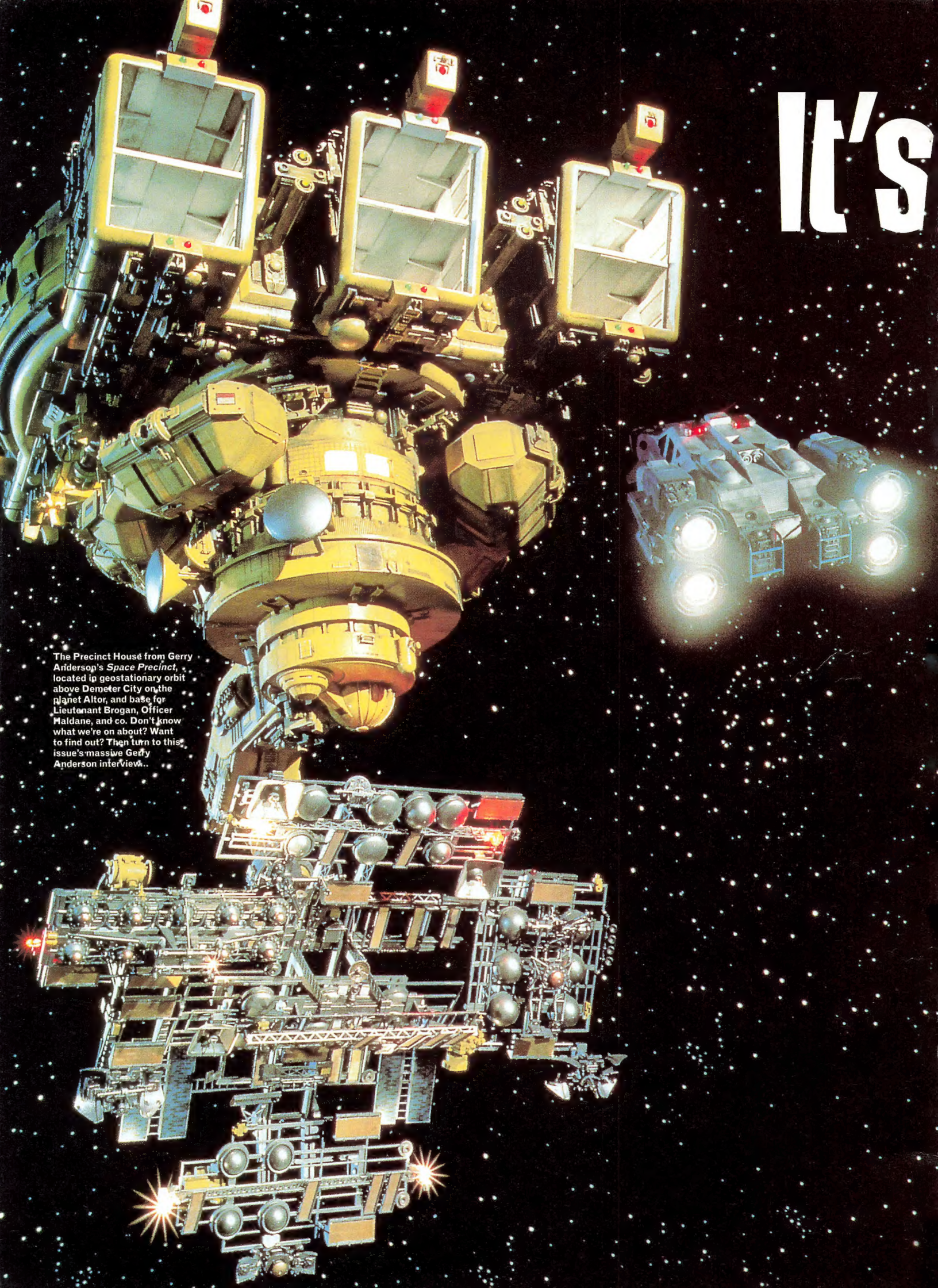

It's

The Precinct House from Gerry Anderson's *Space Precinct*, located in geostationary orbit above Demeter City on the planet Altor, and base for Lieutenant Brogan, Officer Haldane, and co. Don't know what we're on about? Want to find out? Then turn to this issue's massive Gerry Anderson interview...

good to be back!

We trust you enjoyed the first issue of SFX, and hope you find #2 just as much fun. We think it's even better, but really you're the judge of that. Write in and tell us what you think.

Speaking of judges, this issue is dominated by one of them. The new *Judge Dredd* film is released in the UK on 21 July, and we've got 14 pages detailing the making of the movie. The production design looks – in the main – brilliant, but what about the actual film? Read the feature, starting on page 22, and decide for yourself.

Somebody else makes a strong appearance this issue – Gerry Anderson, the veteran puppet master and die-hard SF TV enthusiast. Join what's developed into a bit of an Anderson celebration on page 42.

Finally, I promise not to write quite so much of the magazine next month...

Matt Bielby, editor

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Adventures in Science Fiction

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It's the film we can't wait to see – and dread seeing, in equal measure. So has Hollywood ruined *Judge Dredd?* We talk to director Danny Cannon, writer William Wisher, producer Charles Lippincott and others involved to find out... By **Matt Bielby**, **LA Turner** and others.

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© Rian Hughes

TALES OF MAGIC AND MYSTERY FROM THE MANY WORLDS OF SF AND FANTASY, INCLUDING TOP GOSSIP, LATEST MOVIE NEWS, A FULL LIST OF HUGO AWARD NOMINATIONS, VICTIMS OF PRODUCTION HELL, AND MORE...

Blade Runner 2

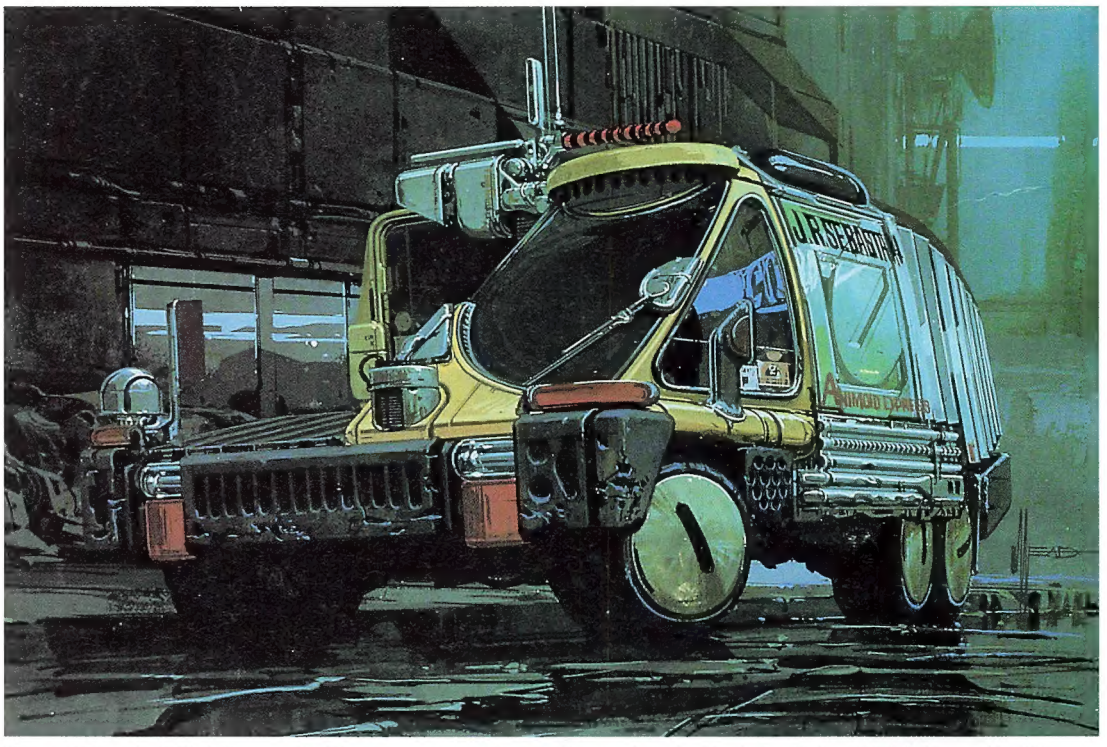
We thought that would get your attention! **MJ Simpson** investigates the quickly snowballing rumour that a full-blown sequel to Ridley Scott's 1981 SF classic will start shooting soon...

Ridley Scott has confirmed that he intends to shoot a big SF movie "in the near future" at Shepperton Studios, which he now owns with his brother Tony. Informed sources are suggesting that this might turn out to be the sequel to the 1981 classic *Blade Runner,* his highly influential adaptation of Philip K Dick's excellent novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

However, SFX can reveal that, although Scott is keen to make *Blade Runner 2*, reports that it is anywhere near production kick-off are hopelessly optimistic. Similarly far-fetched is the jacket of a recent *Deep Space Nine* novel by KW Jeter (author of *Dr Adder*), which claims that Jeter's next project will be *Blade Runner 2: Edge Of Human*. Neither the title nor Jeter's involvement are known to Scott's people.

Ridley's big SF movie is therefore more likely to be *Metropolis*: Not a remake of the 1926 Fritz Lang classic, but a sort of "VR *Westworld*," with a script by Cory Mandel.

The potential for *Blade Runner 2* is immense, however. Should the film go ahead it could spearhead a mini-boom in "serious" SF film-making in the UK – sharing space at Shepperton with Kubrick's *AI* and Paul Anderson's *The Stars My Destination* – and prove to be one of the epoch-making films of the end of the millennium.



The great thing about *Blade Runner* – the thing everyone remembers – is the superb production design. But could *Blade Runner 2* top it?

More Dick on film...

***Blade Runner 2* is only one of a number of Philip K Dick-related projects currently littering industry drawing boards...**

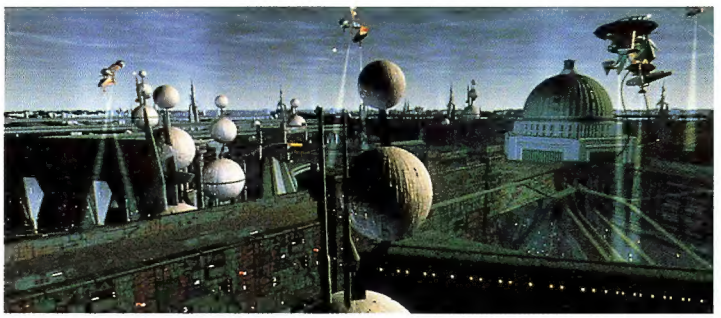
Taking a step closer to completion is *Total Recall 2: Minority Report*, based on a Dick short story. Mario Kassar, who produced *Stargate*, will co-produce with Paul Rassam. Jan de Bont is first choice as director, once he's completed *Speed 2*.

Harrison Ford in the original *Blade Runner*, soon to be a Virgin Interactive CD-ROM.

Miramax is producing a new SF anthology movie, *Dimension*, to be released theatrically sometime in 1997. Among those signed up for half-hour segments of the movie are Gary Fleder – whose *Things to Do When in Denver When You're Dead* debuted in Cannes in May – who'll be adapting Dick's short story *The Imposter;* Michael *(Close Encounters)* Phillips and Bob Weinstein, who'll produce; and Leonard Nimoy, who will be among several directors likely to contribute to the project.

Finally – and quite coincidentally – Virgin Interactive has recently licensed the rights for a *Blade Runner* CD-ROM. To be produced by the same team who adapted Frank Herbert's *Dune*, it won't appear until late 1996 at the earliest. Could be fun, though.

Improved moving action



This is the bit of *Lawn 2* we can't wait for – the virtual city, complete with Albert Hall dome.

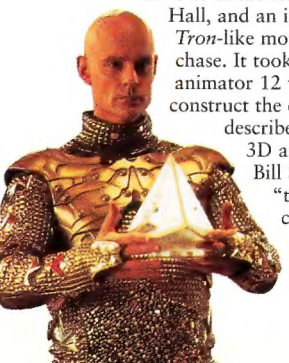
Real-world scenes should be spectacular too.

Cyberspace – once all wire-frame blocks and regular polygons – has come a long way since the likes of *Tron*. For proof, just check out the special effects in *Lawnmower Man 2: Jobe's War*, sequel to 1992's surprise virtual reality hit *The Lawnmower Man*, writes **Dave Golder**.

"I decided I didn't want to go for a quickie sequel," says producer Edward Simons, explaining why it's taken three years for *The Lawnmower Man 2: Jobe's War* to reach completion, and why the budget – at $24 million – is three times that of the original movie. "I thought there was more to the franchise than just a botched re-run of the first film," he adds. "And we wanted to make full use of advances in technology. People are looking to be blown away, and we believe we've achieved that."

He could be right. After all, this new *Lawnmower Man* features over 15 minutes of material set inside cyberspace – much more than the original – including an entire virtual city, boasting a digital dome five times the size of the Royal Albert Hall, and an incredible *Tron*-like motorbike chase. It took one animator 12 weeks to construct the cityscape, described by senior 3D animator Bill Scanlon as "the biggest computer-generated model ever." Storywise, the new movie also slips into a different gear. According to co-writer/director Farhad Mann, writer and director of the US *Max Headroom* pilot, the first film was "melodrama and sci-fi. This is more action adventure, and about people and their emotions."

"Farhad had a fabulous vision of these effects," enthuses Simons. "Only one in a thousand directors understands the process of using effects in a film like this, while keeping the story moving, and he's one of them."



Controlling the Net (above) is the game; the main player Matt Frewer (below-left).

Mann's not the only *Headroom* connection. Taking over the role of Jobe from the original film's star Jeff Fahey is the ex-Max himself, Matt Frewer. Fahey's co-star, Pierce Brosnan, is also nowhere to be seen.

So what about the plot? Well, in *Jobe's War*, Jobe's charred, limbless body is recovered from the ruins of the research centre which exploded at the end of the first film and rushed to special intensive care unit, where doctors try to reconstruct his mind using the latest computer technology. Of course, the obligatory rotten corporation types soon step in with a plan to use Jobe's powers to control the Net, and that's when things really shift into gear...

The Lawnmower Man 2: Jobe's War will be released in the US in July, and in the UK around November. In the meantime, feast your eyes on the virtual city – and dream on...

Invisibles spotted!

There's cause for "guarded optimism" about a British TV series based on DC's cult comic *The Invisibles*, writes Stuart Campbell...

The Invisibles author Grant Morrison is currently working on scripts for a possible TV version of his recently-launched comic. BBC Scotland's Drama Department has confirmed rumours that have been buzzing around the SF community for some time by revealing that it has indeed commissioned a few stories. After being impressed by a single first draft, the company is now "seeing how it all turns out," according to PR officer Shirley Whiteside.

While *The Invisibles* series is still quite a long way from getting the definite green light, there seems to be pretty strong justification for at least guarded optimism. How much watering down of *The Invisibles'* notably adult style there may be for Auntie Beeb, though, remains to be seen. Rumour has it that a "classic *Avengers* style" look and feel will be the order of the day.

More news on this – and other new British SF TV projects in development – as and when...

This month in Strange Tales...

WILD!

He has his ups, he has his downs, but John Carpenter remains one of SFX's favourite directors. We talk to him about his latest horrorfest on **page 10.**

CRAZY!

It's a bonkers place – and a tough old job – but someone had to do it. Nigel Floyd reports on new SF announced at the Cannes film festival on **page 12.**

MAD!

Intersection's the name of this year's long-awaited Worldcon, to be held in Glasgow this August. Check the action on **page 14.**

FAB!

Daleks, Klingons and at least two Doctors packed out the crowds at the SFX launch party. Celebrate on **page 19.**

BAD!

Simon Bisley's the current king of British comics. Now he talks to SFX about his new series with Frank Miller on **page 20.**

SFX Top Tens

Okay, based on an original conversation at the back of a bus between our mate Rob Pegley and his pal, here's the SF-influenced bands top ten – in reverse order, of course.

10. T'Pau
9. Westworld
8. The Mekons (featuring David Langford's brother!)
7. Mega City Four
6. The Triffids
5. The Teardrop Explodes (from a caption in an old Marvel comic, fact fans!)
4. Dalek, I love you
3. Alphaville
2. Heaven 17
1. Duran Duran

"Don't quote us!"

Where we trawl the wastebins of the movie industry for the things they don't want us to know...

Several studios in Hollyweird are fighting to secure the rights to a script by UK-based writer Caroline Batten, called, simply, *Bermuda*, which tells the story of a plane load of tourists who suddenly appear out of the Bermuda triangle 40 years after entering it, and of the difficulties they face coming to terms with the '90s. Rumours abound that the likes of *Back to the Future's* Robert Zemeckis and *Gremlin's* Joe Dante are eager to direct, with the other hot tip claiming Tom Hanks would make an ideal plane captain...

The trend of reviving ancient TV shows as over-budgeted big screen bonanzas continues, with *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* due to start shooting in the next six months, if all goes according to plan. Cameo appearances by some of the original TV cast are promised, and monsters that won't look like the rubber-suited wonders from the original. Also on the creaky TV front, the latest casting rumblings on *The Prisoner* movie include return appearances by Leo McKern and Alexis Kanner alongside Patrick McGoohan, who was recently being touted as the new Mr Waverly for the Tarantino *Man from UNCLE* movie (which the director continues to deny all knowledge of). Then again, they said Jack Nicholson would never play The Joker, didn't they?

Joel Schumacher's restyling of the caped crusader for *Batman Forever* has sent pulses racing at the Warner Brothers office complex in LA. So much so that Schumacher now seems certain to helm the fourth film, *Batman Triumphant*, with the men in suits dreaming of getting a certain Mr Nicholson back in alongside Mr Carrey. And they thought putting Tommy Lee Jones on screen with the man was dangerous...

That's not all, folks...

Fantomcat – the swashbuckling, er, cat-like one on the left – jousts with a bull-monster in the forthcoming, eponymous, Cosgrove Hall show. We can't wait till September, quite frankly.

There's plenty of new SF-flavoured animation from France, the USA and – yes! – Britain on it's way. **MJ Simpson** gets excited...

Classy animated shows like *Batman* and *Reboot* have shown, in recent years, just what can be done with quality animation, so it's great to see the following TV projects making headway...

First off there's *Insektors*, a French fantasy adventure series acquired by Channel 4, and Carlton's *Animated Horror Stories*, comprising six half-hour adaptations of *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Jekyll & Hyde* and other classics. Meanwhile, over in the States, a couple of popular cartoons as yet unseen over here are *Monster Force* and *Gargoyles*. The former turns the classic Universal horror monsters into superheroes, but *Gargoyles* is more interesting. A gothic tale of mythical creatures battling the forces of evil in a starkly realised Manhattan, it features the voice talents of *The Next Generation's* William Frakes and Marina Sirtis.

***Gargoyles:* The dark side of Disney.**

Then there's top British animation studio Cosgrove Hall Films – creators of *Danger Mouse*, *Count Duckula* and *Avenger Penguins* – which has a new series called *Fantomcat* coming to ITV from 4 September. The eponymous hero is a swashbuckling feline who accidentally gets transported into the 21st century, where he battles the evil gang-boss spider Marmagora and her henchmen. Former-Messiah-turned-comedy-detective Robert Powell provides the voice for the time-travelling feline.

Cosgrove Hall's other big project is a pilot for Pratchett's *Discworld*, a proposed 13-part series for Channel 4. This will be adapted from *Reaper Man* and *Soul Music* – and *not* from *The Colour Of Magic* as reported last issue. Unlike *Truckers*, Cosgrove Hall's previous Pratchett outing, which utilised stop-motion techniques, *Discworld* will be a mix of drawn (cartoon) and model work.

Finally, one forthcoming cartoon unlikely to drag SFX editors out of bed on a Saturday morning is – hurrah – *Stargate!* Can't wait...

It came from beyond the grave

MJ Simpson compiles a list of upcoming creature features...

Bloodsuckers!
Russell Mulcahy will direct *Vampires*, which features a Vatican-backed anti-undead squad. Meanwhile, Quentin Tarantino has written – and will star in – *From Dusk to Dawn*, in which the vamps are mown down by (holy) water pistols. *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*, Mel Brooks' new flick stars Leslie Nielsen. Eddie Murphy's *A Vampire in Brooklyn* has been completed, but is not due out until after Jekyll & Hyde spoof *The Nutty Professor*.

Mad scientists!
Another J&H flick is *Mary Reilly*, in which Julia Roberts plays Jekyll's maid. Then there's *Dr Jekyll & Ms Hyde*, in which the scientist turns himself into Sean Young. Er...

Dead dudes!
Only one *Frankenstein* flick is currently in preparation: Rutger Hauer stars in *Mr Stitch*, a modern take on the story. Wil Wheaton (Wesley from *The Next Generation*) also stars.

Giant dinosaurs!
The big American remake of *Godzilla* is off... No, on... No, off – again! Director Jan de Bont *(Speed)* said he couldn't do it for less than $135 million, so he packed his bags and the whole thing has now been put on hold. Last time it was delayed, the Japanese Toho company – who made all the previous *Godzilla* flicks – filled the gap by making *Godzilla Vs Space Godzilla* at short notice. Now, with the US Godzilla once more out of the running, the gentlemen at Toho have again moved swiftly and are currently producing *Godzilla Vs Destroyer*, directed by Takao Okagawa.

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's a giant, flying, radioactive turtle called Gamera! Scary, isn't it?

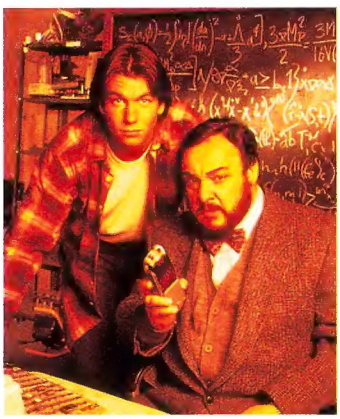
Incidentally, Godzilla's main rival in the '60s – in cinematic terms – was Gamera, the giant flying turtle created by Daiei Films. Gamera was brought back to the big screen last year, and starred a young Japanese lady who turns out to be Stephen Segal's daughter!

It's culling time!

The new US TV season: Who will live and who will die?

It's that time of the year again – time for the US TV networks to look at the ratings for the past season and decide which series to renew, which need a complete overhaul, and which should be rapidly consigned to the dumper. **Dave Golder** reports...

One look at the TV reviews in SFX will reveal the sorry truth – most science fiction TV shows are made in America these days, and what you and I'll be be enjoying on Sky and the terrestrial stations next year depends very much on what the American networks renew or cancel now. Every year we wait to bated breath to see what'll live and what'll die – though, truth be told, this time round there've been few surprises.



Jerry O'Connell and John Rhys-Davies in Fox's *Sliders*: "The jury's still out."

The strange, moody, but undeniably spectacular *White Dwarf* – "like *Twin Peaks* in space," some say – may be picked up for a series. See our review of the pilot episode on page 80.

Star Trek first, then. *Voyager* will be back, of course – indeed, it's about the only series returning to the fledgling United Paramount Network (UPN), despite falling ratings throughout the year. *Deep Space Nine* survives for another year too, despite a generally underwhelmed reaction to the introduction of super-enemies The Dominion this year.

The future of UPN's *Legend* – an SF-tinged western, and pet project of current *Trek* Godfather Michael Piller – is very much in the balance, however. UPN has not found a place for it in the Fall schedule, but hasn't cancelled it outright, either. A last-ditch attempt to improve ratings has seen it moved to a post-*Voyager* time slot, with a number of the better episodes being reshown. Michael Piller has also been on the Internet, appealing for fans to e-mail in with support. If the campaign goes well, the show could easily return as a mid-season replacement.

Another series with an uncertain future is *seaQuest DSV*, which has been renewed – but only for 13 episodes. In an audacious end to the second series, the super-sub gets carted off by a UFO to an alien planet in the midst of a civil war. The third season will begin with the crew's return to Earth some six years later.

Whether everyone comes back, however, is the subject of some debate. Apparently, Roy Scheider (Captain Nathan Bridger) wasn't happy with the quality of script during the second season, and demanded a degree of creative control which was refused him. This being the case, it seems he will appear in as few episodes as possible under his contractual obligations. However, he is still in discussion with Amblin, so this could change.

The revamped *Lois and Clark*, meanwhile, has actually been building ratings this year, and the series cruises to a third season. The second series ends with Clark proposing to Lois, and – according to Dean Cain – the third year could take off in a very different direction, showing what life would be like for Superman if he got hitched.

"A new adventure into the realms of openness and love," is how Cain describes it. "Our show will *really* take off when that happens."

Also entering their third seasons are *The X-Files* and *Babylon 5*, which begins shooting at the end of July. *Forever Knight* and *The Legendary Journeys of Hercules* have both been recommissioned, although the jury's still out on *Sliders*. Despite a very successful pilot episode, ratings fell 20% for the series, so a second year now looks extremely unlikely.

Rumours of *RoboCop's* death, however, appear to have been very much exaggerated. True, the show's US distributor has backed out of financing the series because of low ratings in the States, but the production company that actually makes the show – Skyvision – has managed to find financial backing from, of all places, ITV. If further funding can be secured it's likely Robo will return in the form of four two-hour TV movies.

Definitely going the way of all flesh are *VR5*, *MANTIS* and the incredibly tedious *Earth 2*. Don't worry, though – they'll all probably turn up on BBC 2 soon enough. Then you can see for yourself why they were axed...

Dig the new breed!

Meet the new shows queuing up to fill the holes in the US schedules...

The Kindred

An Aaron *(Beverley Hills 90210)* Spelling produced vampire series.

Space

Created by ex-*X-Files* producers, Glen Morgan and Jerry Wong, this will be Fox Television's most expensive drama series ever. It focuses on a group of young military cadets fighting alien invaders.

Xena: Warrior Princess

Sword 'n' sorcery spin off from Universal's inexplicably popular *The Legendary Journeys of Hercules*.

Deadly Games

Stars Christopher Lloyd as a video game villain who crosses over into the real world. Leonard Nimoy is the executive producer.

Nowhere Man

Created by Tobe *(Poltergeist)* Hooper, this is described as a contemporary combination of *The Fugitive* and *The Prisoner*. A photographer wakes up one day to discover he doesn't exist.

Star Command

A "serious" SF drama set in the 22nd century currently being filmed in Germany. Serious, apparently, means no aliens or laser space battles. Sounds great.

White Dwarf

The pilot was shown in May, and a series is a possibility, although no decision has been made yet. Created by Bruce Wagner (who worked on the much over-rated *Wild Palms*), it's been described as "*Twin Peaks* in space."

Horror debuts at the NFT

There'll be a Clive Barker retrospective and more at Fantasm '95, writes Dave Golder.

The UK premières of a dozen horror films, including Clive Barker's *Lord of Illusions*, will take place at Fantasm '95 at the National Film Theatre, London, between 2-26 July. This, the second annual festival of science fiction and fantasy, returns to the NFT with 24 screenings. Other premières include *The Puppet Master*, *Last Gasp*, (Wes Craven Presents) *Mindripper*, *Hideaway* (with Jeff Goldblum), *Candyman 2: A Farewell to the Flesh* and *Dr Jekyll and Ms Hyde*.

Two never-released Cliver Barker shorts from the '70s, *Salome* and *The Forbidden* (which will be released on Redemption videos later this year), will also be shown for the first time. They form part of a Barker retrospective, which also includes a lecture by Bob Keen, director of *Proteus* (see our on-set report on page 60) and special effects supervisor on many Barker projects. Other events include a *Guardian* interview with veteran horror cameraman Freddie Francis *(Paranoiac, Torture Garden, Tales of the Crypt)* and a memorabilia market.

For further details, contact the NFT box office on ☎ (0171) 928 3232.

The Jonathan Craven (Wes's son) produced *Mindripper*, a monster-packed horror film.

Love, craft & madness

In the Mouth of Madness isn't the latest SF/horror film from the increasingly prolific horror/ fantasy/SF movie veteran John Carpenter – his remake of *Village of the Damned* was more recently released in the States – but it's only just earned itself a British release. **Nigel Floyd** met him shortly after filming finished last year...

Setting up a special effects shot on the set of John Carpenter's *In the Mouth of Madness*. "I've taken stuff from Lovecraft, Nigel Kneale, and Stephen King," says Carpenter.

"What you have in *In the Mouth of Madness,*" explains seasoned director John Carpenter, "is an old-fashioned narrative – the man in the asylum tells his story but, of course, he thinks he's not insane."

After 20 years of film-making, from *Dark Star* in 1974 to his most recent Lovecraftian nightmare, Carpenter has retained three things: His love of genre movies, his sense of humour and his Kentucky accent.

"This is one of my favourite films because it's just so nuts. You get to take this cynical character and turn him into a gibbering idiot!"

A consummate craftsman and gifted storyteller, Carpenter has had a huge influence over the horror/SF genres, with *Halloween* (1978), *The Fog* (1981), *Escape From New York* (1981), *The Thing* (1982), *Starman* (1984) and *They Live* (1988).

With *In the Mouth of Madness*, Carpenter confronts head-on the wild Lovecraftian weirdness only hinted at in his previous work. "This is the first time I've gone to him directly," explains Carpenter. "The screenplay called for the character of the writer (Jurgen Prochnow) to be writing stuff like Lovecraft, so this was my chance to really do it for the first time."

The Prochnow character, Sutter Cane, is a successful author whose horror novels, it's alleged, are exercising a bad influence over his more susceptible readers. Shortly before his latest novel is due to be delivered, Cane disappears without trace, so his publishers hire world-weary insurance investigator John Trent (Sam Neill) to track him down. However, on entering Cane's small home town of Hobb's End, the cynical Trent experiences a progressive blurring of the line between reality and fiction.

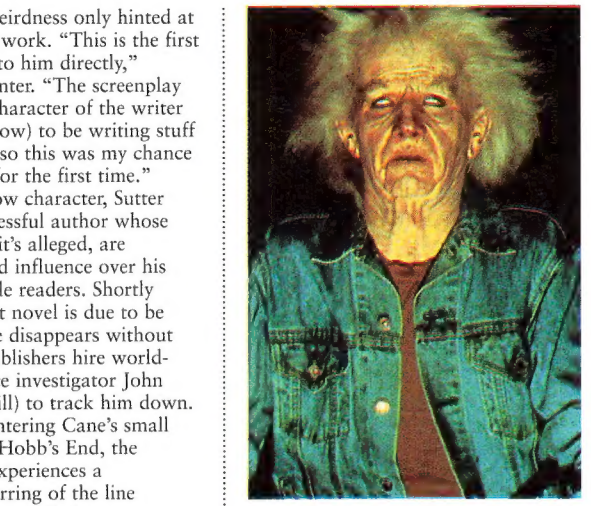
"Basically, what you have here is a cross-genre movie with a *Big Sleep*-style investigator who eventually finds himself, literally, 'in the mouth of madness.' The question is, is he insane or is the world *really* ending?"

Carpenter also takes some sly sideswipes at the current moral panic concerning the influence of horror on "vulnerable" readers or viewers. "You know, I've been hearing this debate since I was a kid," he says. "When I was young, I remember watching a very earnest CBS television show about foreign films being too violent for the US public. It's exactly the same as what they did with comic books back in the '50s.

"But you'll notice something that happens every time there's one of these moral purges. For example, the comic book panic came around the time delinquency was on the rise... Here were these kids who were bored. They'd left high school, they were out of work, and the crime rate went up. So they all said: 'Oh dear me, there must be something causing all this, and it can't be real life, so it's got be something like comics or horror movies.' They just looked for the cheapest target."

Thankfully, such issues don't dissuade Carpenter from doing what he does best – making films. His most recent project, in fact, was a re-make of the '60s SF classic *Village of the Damned* (based on John Wyndham's novel *The Midwich Cuckoos).*

In the Mouth... *is reviewed on page 75.*



One of the odd characters Sam Neill meets in Hobb's End – a constantly ageing cyclist.

"Basically, what you have here is a cross-genre movie, with a *Big Sleep*-style investigator who eventually finds himself, literally, 'in the mouth of madness.' The question is, is he insane or is the world *really* coming to an end?"

John Carpenter

So who is... ED WOOD?

Briefly: Edward D Wood Jr was a struggling writer/director/producer, who began staging his own plays at an early age. Eventually, he moved into film production, where he became responsible for the worst canon of movies ever.

Is he any good? Of course not. *Plan 9,* for instance, is notable for: Gravestones which fall over; an aircraft cockpit which is just a curtain across a doorway; dialogue such as "He's dead. Murdered. And somebody's responsible!"; and the almost complete absence of the film's star, Bela Lugosi.

Major works: Wood befriended the aging horror star Bela Lugosi towards the end of his life, and put him in two films: *Glen or Glenda,* and *Bride of the Monster* before the film that became *Plan 9...*

After filming one short sequence for *Grave Robbers from Outer Space,* as it was then called, Lugosi died. Wood later re-wrote the script, changed the title, and hired his girlfriend's chiropractor, Dr Tom Mason, as Lugosi's double. The doctor bore no resemblance to Lugosi and therefore had to disguise himself by always holding his cape over his face. Sadly, this failed to hide the fact he was nearly a foot taller.

What's he like? As if being The Worst Director Of All Time wasn't enough, Wood was also a practising transvestite which made his starring role in *Glen or Glenda* a very personal one. His girlfriend Dolores Fuller – his co-star in *Glen or Glenda* – eventually left him because of his penchant for angora sweaters. Kathy O'Hara, who he met later, had no such problem.

Johnny Depp *is* Ed Wood in the great Tim Burton biopic.

Key themes: Cross-dressing; wood (as in performances, sets, his name); eternal optimism.

Friends and lovers: Also among the repertory company Wood built up were: Bunny Breckenridge, camp actor who toyed with the idea of a sex-change; Conrad Brooks, bit-part actor who has since taken a perverse pride in appearing in as many zero-budget productions as possible; Criswell, Hollywood psychic who made many TV appearances in the '60s; Tor Johnson, Swedish wrestler who appeared in numerous horror, fantasy and comedy films throughout the '40s and '50s; Paul Marco, actor who has since made something of a career out of his regular character, Kelton the Cop; and the famous Vampira, wasp-waisted horror hostess whose sporadic film career petered out in the '60s but who is now a frequent guest at conventions.

Important point: Ed Wood's real life was as strange as any movie.

Suggested viewing: *Glen or Glenda, Bride of the Monster* and *Plan 9...* All available on Pickwick video and reviewed on page 85.

HMV

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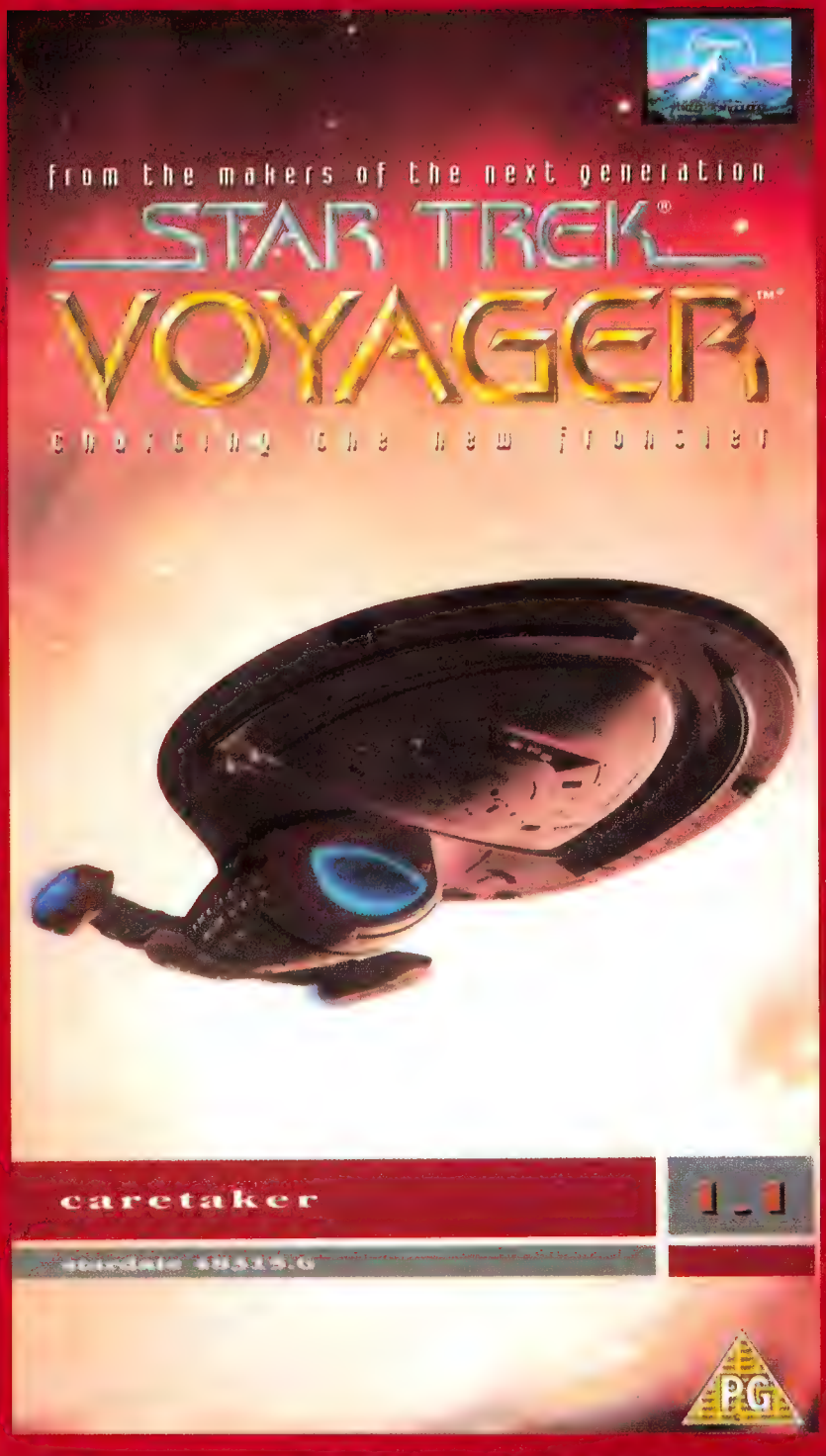
From the makers of
Star Trek
The Next Generation
comes the first story of a brand new Star Trek series. The fourth incarnation of the Star Trek legend,
Star Trek Voyager
features an entirely new cast of fascinating characters, a brand new ship, exotic new aliens and a previously unexplored quadrant of the Galaxy.



VOLUME 1

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This just in...

The Bigger Issue

Redbrick Eden is the title of a forthcoming anthology of original SF, fantasy and horror stories, based on the theme of homelessness. All proceeds from the project, which already has several major publishers interested, will go to homeless charities to aid the many thousands currently sleeping rough in Britain's cities.

"City streets can be frightening, but they can also be fantastic places," says editor Steve Savile, who founded *Dark Asylum* magazine, and has written for such notable publications as *Beyond, Exuberance* and the late lamented *Fear*, winning a variety of small press awards.

Contributors already lined up include Peter James, Graham Masterton and Stephen Laws, along with new writers Mary Corran and Adam Nichols – plus some other big names which SFX can't reveal just yet.

Steve is keen to receive submissions from authors, both established and new, especially those with stories in the currently under-represented genres of science fiction and fantasy. Obviously, nobody is getting paid for this project, but if you have a suitable story, you can contact Steve at 15 Umfraville Dene, Prudhoe, Northumberland NE42 5JF or on ☎ (0191) 4218260. Redbrick Edens will be published sometime in 1996.

Curtains for Pratchett

Since 1991, the Studio Theatre Club in

"Easy writer," read the book adverts, depicting this Harley-riding Pratchett.

Abingdon has been presenting plays based on the works of Terry Pratchett, adapted by and starring Stephen Briggs (co-author of *The Discworld Companion* and co-cartographer of *The Streets Of Ankh-Morpork*). Having previously staged *Mort, Wyrd Sisters, Guards! Guards!* and *Men At Arms*, the STC is now embarking on new territory in November. The fine amateur thespians of Abingdon will be presenting Pratchett's *Maskerade* simultaneously with its hardback publication by Gollancz.

Also in November, Terry and Stephen follow up their best-selling map *The Streets Of Ankh-Morpork* with *The Discworld Mapp*.

Darkman/Tremors for TV

The *Darkman* series of movies *(Darkman, Darkman Returns* and *Darkman 3: Die, Darkman, Die)* is spinning off TV-wards with a straight to video Part 4-pilot, as is brill 1989 giant worm flick *Tremors*.

Looks Who's back!

The BBC has officially announced that a two-hour *Doctor Who* is in development as a co-production between BBC Worldwide and Universal Television. Just as we were going to press, the BBC confirmed that a story outline has been approved and Matthew Jacobs has been commissioned to write the script. Jacobs' previous writing credits include *Paper House* (1989) and *Lassie* (1993). Further details will be announced after the script's been approved.

The SFX 1995 Cannes Film Festival Report

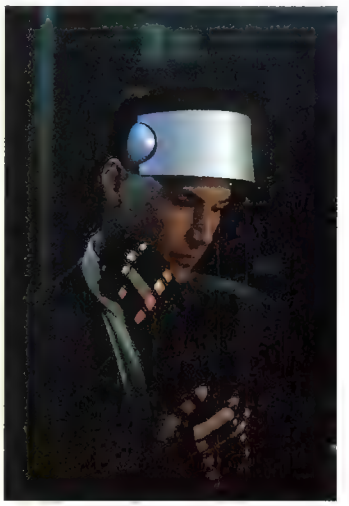
© Rex Features

It's a tough job...

...but somebody's got to do it. **Nigel Floyd** braves the annual frenzy of luvvie backslapping, cringeworthy publicity stunts, on-the-spot deals and free beer that is the Cannes Film Festival – and even manages to get himself a tan while doing it, apparently. The poor dear.

Movies at the Cannes Film Festival fall into four broad categories: Those that have been made, those that are being made, those that will be made, and those that exist only as full-page glossy ads in the trade press, but which are being touted with the same shameless confidence anyway.

The most conspicuous future project at this year's festival was – no surprises here – *Barb Wire*, a $20 million adaptation of the Dark Horse comic starring *Baywatch* babe Pamela Anderson, whose silicon breasts, lipsticked pout and ironic tag-line – "Don't call me babe!" – graced giant posters the length of the Croisette. Ms Anderson herself was also much in evidence. In a black, low-cut leather dress, she revealed – to groans of disappointment from the slavering press – that the PG-13 film would include "sexy things, but not actual sex." Probing queries about her tattoos, her recent marriage, and her sculpted body ("Believe me, I wouldn't melt if I stood by a radiator") gave way to praise for the production team and the candid admission that "I'm the only thing that can screw it up, basically." So



Keanu in *Johnny Mnemonic*, shown at Cannes but not in the UK until December.

that lets director Adam Rifkin *(The Chase)* and writer Chuck Pfarrer *(The Mask)* off the hook anyway.

The low-profile market screenings of Philip Ridley's *The Passion of Darkly Noon*, Michael Almereda's *Nadja* and Tony Hiles' *Jack Brown, Genius* were more typical of the treatment accorded to genre films in Cannes – i.e. they were screened in smaller cinemas away from the main drag. Except that is, for *The City of the Lost Children*, Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro's follow-up to *Delicatessen*, which was selected as the opening film. Sadly, this resulted in it being screened *before* many of the press had arrived, which meant it suffered from both a lack of exposure and growing rumours that its visual inventiveness and wit were pulled down by its poor storytelling and wafer-thin characterisation.

Ironically, almost as much fuss was made about the 12-minute show reels for Roger Donaldson's *Species* and *The Lawnmower Man 2: Jobe's War*, for which British actor Patrick Bergin was banging the drum.

Reactions to *Jack Brown, Genius*, produced by Peter Jackson's Wingnut Films, were decidedly mixed. It's a lively but slightly anodyne tale about a medieval monk whose spirit enters the scrambled brain of nutty, present-day inventor Jack Brown (Timothy Balme from *Braindead)*. Inspired by the monk's 1,000-year-old ideas, the loopy Jack sets about creating an elaborate pair of wings, but not before he attracts the attentions of

Canned Facts

New projects announced at the Cannes Film Festival.

Dark Horse comics is developing *The Green Hornet*, Paul Chadwick's graphic novel *Concrete*, a Chuck *(The Mask)* Pfarrer script, *Virus* ("About an alien virus that cannibalises humans to animate machinery" – sounds intriguing), an original project, *The Machine*, and sequels to the hugely successful *The Mask* and *TimeCop*.

British outfit Working Title will film Philip Kerr's *Gridiron*, about an automated building that turns on its occupants.

Clive Barker's next project will be *Ectosphere* – "Science calls it a parallel dimension. Mystics call it the hereafter. You'll call it the adventure of a lifetime."

Alien designer HR Giger is linked to another project after Roger Donaldson's *Species* – sfx man Jamie Dixon's *Supernova*.

Gamera: Guardian of the Universe revives the 30 year old Jap monster movie franchise.

Mark Dippe, one of the sfx wizards behind the fabulous *Jurassic Park*, will direct New Line's *Spawn*, based on the best-selling Todd McFarlane comic.

Stuart Gordon's Full Moon project *Hideous* is now called *Castle Freak*.

Gordon also directs *Space Truckers*, starring renta-mental Dennis Hopper, last seen losing his head in *Speed*.

Good news for Wyndham aficionados who have been waiting what seems a lifetime for some half-decent adaptations. London-based Samuelson Productions are developing a film version of John Wyndham's sci-fi novel *The Chrysalids* (along with Mary *"Pet Sematary"* Lambert's Gothic thriller *The Gathering)*.

In Tobe Hooper's *The Dentist*, invading aliens can reproduce only in the filled cavities of unsuspecting Earthlings! We assume this is a comedy, then.

Now that's Cannes! A month ago nobody had ever heard of Dark Horse's *Barb Wire* comic book. Squeeze Pamela Anderson into skintight leggings, though, and suddenly it's headline news. Pam's even got a barbed wire tattoo on her arm to show her commitment to the role!

The Boss (Edward Campbell), an evil Scot with a leather-clad mistress, Sylvia (Lisa Chappel), in tow. Darker and more disturbing was Philip Ridley's adult fairy tale, *The Passion of Darkly Noon,* in which the sole survivor from a massacred Christian fundamentalist community takes refuge in an ostracised couple's isolated forest cabin, where his repressed desires and religious fervour wreak havoc on himself and his two victims. Although the first hour suffers from too much telling and not enough showing, this features the same masterly fusion of images and sounds found in *The Reflecting Skin.* So when the deranged Darkly Noon finally loses the plot, wraps himself in barbed wire and runs amok, Ridley certainly delivered the goods.

More restrained was Michael Almereda's *avant garde* vampire movie, *Nadja,* which uses sharp black-and-white images and grainy Pixelvision dream sequences to tell the story of a brother and sister (Jared Harris and Elina Lowensohn) struggling to cut their shared blood line. Investing its generic material with the same emotional dimension that was present in the film-maker's debut, the all-Pixelvision feature, *Another Girl, Another Planet,* Almereda offers yet another variation on the familiar mythology: "When you tell a story about vampires," explains Almereda, "it's inevitably a story that everyone knows. So it's possible – perhaps necessary – to put a certain spin on it, make it new. Here, the idea was to cross the Dracula legend with parallel plots involving a dysfunctional family and an unstable marriage... to locate horror movie anxiety in the heart of common experience." Entirely financed by celebrity weirdo David Lynch, who has a brief but arresting cameo as a security guard, this also stars ageing easy rider Peter Fonda as an eccentric Van Helsing.

A quick look at the trailer for Bob Keen's *Proteus* (see set-report this issue on page 60) suggested that the sfx-man-turned-director had done a fine job, an impression reinforced over dinner by producer Paul Brooks. This was more than could be gleaned from the trade press ads for the catchily-titled *Headless Body in Topless Bar,* which was still pipped for the Best Title of the Fest award by Meir Zarchi's hilariously misspelt (and seemingly more comfortable) sequel to one of the most infamous "video nasties" of them all, *I Sit on Your Grave Part 2.*

Gratuitous? Us? You don't understand – this is an important news story! "Don't call me babe!" screamed the *Barb Wire* posters – ironically, all things considered.

This just in...

What next for Mel?

Quite why Mel Gibson is being touted to star in remakes of practically every '60s TV series going remains unclear. Following long-standing rumours that he'll play John Steed in the much-touted *Avengers* movie – currently scheduled for helming by Nicholas *(Wrath of Khan)* Meyer, and now joined by an equally shrill Hugh Grant/Liz Hurley pairing rumour – and Number Six in the *Prisoner* movie, comes the most hard 'n' fast news yet. The fact is, Mel will definitely *not* play the title role in *The Saint,* even though Paramount reportedly approached him on bended knees. The movie will be directed by Phillip Noyce from a script by Jonathan Hensleigh and Terry Hayes.

Meanwhile, rumours that young Mr Gibson could be Mr Rusty in the live action *Magic Roundabout* movie remain unconfirmed. Industry insiders, however, are pooh-poohing the idea...

Batman: "Not the Care Bears" shock!

"There's always a dark edge to *Batman,"* observes Joel Schumacher, director of this year's Dark Knight outing. "It's never going to be the *Care Bears."*

Nevertheless, Warners has been at pains to point out that *Batman Forever's* "dark edge" will be significantly softer than that of its predecessors. After all, *Batman Returns* missed out on a lot of licensing and merchandising deals because many considered it too gloomy for kids.

With Burton now firmly ensconced as producer, Warners has been parading Schumacher as the nice, kid-friendly alternative – despite his previous directorial outings, teen-angst vampire classic *The Lost Boys,* OBE horror opus *Flatliners,* and middle-class-dude-from-Hell movie *Falling Down...*

Ghost in the machine

Die Hard 2 and *Cutthroat Island* director Renny Harlin will take charge of *Exit Zero,* after New Line Cinema bought Kurt Wimmer's script for $1 million. The ghost-in-the-machine story concerns a self-aware Internet, which tries to take over the world. It will probably (hopefully) be a lot better than it sounds.

SF down under

Australia has produced a variety of interesting children's SF series recently, but adult Aussie telefantasy has been a little thin on the ground. Now actor Bryan Brown is to produce a series called *Twisted Tales* for Channel Nine, which is described as an Australian *Twilight Zone* (the series, not the station). Also in the Antipodean offing is *Return to Jupiter,* a sequel to the Jap/Oz serial *Escape from Jupiter* which aired on The Family Channel last year and is currently showing on the BBC. Shooting starts early next year.

Meanwhile, a TV movie based on Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Harrison Bergeron* has also been filmed Down Under, as was the pilot for a new US series called *Space.* This succinctly named show is a gritty, realistic space opera – a sort of *Star Wars* with sweat – created by *The X-Files'* executive producers Glen Morgan and James Wong.

Toeing the line

The film adaptation of John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids,* a tale of post-nuclear anti-mutant hatred, is being scripted by Stephen Volk – writer of *Dream Demon, Gothic,* the BBC's *Ghostwatch,* and a few episodes of the TV series *Ghosts.* The $25 million production will begin shooting next year.

58 days and counting...

...until Intersection, the 53rd World Science Fiction Convention, held in the UK for the first time since 1987. Between 24-28 August are the dates, the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre in Glasgow is the location, Martin Easterbrook is the chairman, and **MJ Simpson** is the SFX-bloke who went to meet him in a Swindon pub to find out about it all...

The Worldcon is the largest, longest-running annual SF convention in the world. It's been described as a sort of "mobile city" which sets up each year in a different location. Most Worldcons are held in the USA, although every few years they travel further afield.

As you'd expect from the name, Worldcons are very international events, attracting around 5,000 visitors, mostly American and British, but with strong contingents from Germany, Holland, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe. The committee itself is similarly international.

"We've got Scottish and English members, of course, and Americans, Germans, Dutch, and Norwegians – all linked by e-mail," explains Martin Easterbrook, the event organiser. "There are about 100 committee members all told, running divisions such as promotions, operations, publications and so on. Another 500 or so will be helping as stewards and security, with another 500 taking part in the panels, workshops and so on."

Intersection is run by the World Science Fiction Society (an entity set up solely to run Worldcons), but staff do the work purely for their love of SF. The whole set-up is an entirely non-profit-making affair.

Special guests

So what's on offer? Well, the Guests of Honour ("GoH") are Gerry Anderson – see The SFX Interview this issue, starting on page 42 – and Samuel R Delaney, author of *Stars In My Pocket Like Grains Of Sand*, *Dhalgren* and the *Neveryön* fantasy novels. "We wanted one very literary guest and one very media-based guest," explains Martin. "We also have Les Edwards as our artist GoH, while our fan GoH is Vinc Clark. Unusually, there are two Toastmasters to present the Hugo Awards this year: Diane Duane and Peter Morwoode."

The Scottish Exhibition Centre in Glasgow (top-left), and what you can expect (above).

There will be over 200 well-known authors at Intersection in all – "Pretty much every British or American author who hasn't missed a deadline and been locked up by their publisher will be there," says Martin. "Iain Banks, Harry Harrison, Brian Aldiss... Hundreds of authors, along with artists, editors, effects people and other professionals" – and roughly 400 events have been scheduled over the five-day period. These cover all strands of science fiction and SF fandom: Literature, games, science, film, fannish events and writers' workshops. In addition, there will be screenings of numerous SF movies, both modern and classic, two 24-hours-a-day video programmes running throughout, an enormous dealers room – and lots of parties.

Above all, Intersection will be *fun*. As Martin says: "It's not a bunch of stars being wheeled on and off stage. We've got something for everyone!"

How to register

Postal registrations for Intersection are available until the end of July, after which you'll have to register at the door. There are numerous hotels, B&Bs and flats nearby – full details are available from the convention address – and there will be plenty of introductory events too. There'll even be a crèche and a children's programme. For further details, see this month's Live! on page 104.

The Oscars? Mere baubles. The Booker Prize? Who cares? It's... The 1995 Hugo Award nominations!

And the nominations are:

Best Short Story
"Mrs. Lincoln's China" by M Shayne Bell
"Dead Man's Curve" by Terry Bisson
"None So Blind" by Joe Haldeman
"Understanding Entropy" by Barry N Malzberg
"Barnaby in Exile" by Mike Resnick
"I Know What You're Thinking" by Kate Wilhelm

Best Dramatic Presentation
"All Good Things" (*TNG*)
Interview with the Vampire
The Mask
Stargate
Star Trek: Generations

Best Novel
Mother of Storms by John Barnes
Brittle Innings by Michael Bishop
Mirror Dance by Lois McMaster Bujold
Beggars and Choosers by Nancy Kress
Towing Jehovah by James Morrow

Best Non-fiction
I. Asimov: A Memoir by Isaac Asimov
Spectrum: The Best In Contemporary Fantastic Art by Cathy Burnett *et al*
Silent Interviews: On Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and some Comics by Samuel R. Delany
Making Book by Teresa Nielsen Hayden
The Book on the Edge of Forever by Christopher Priest

Best Fanzine
Ansible, edited by David Langford
File 770, edited by Mike Glyer
Habakkuk, edited by Bill Donaho
Lan's Lantern, edited by George Laskowski
Mimosa, edited by Dick & Nicki Lynch

Best Fan Writer
Sharon Farber
Mike Glyer
Andy Hooper
David Langford
Evelyn C Leeper

Other categories include Best Editor, Fan Artist, Semi-Prozine, etc. Full results in issue 5.

PRODUCTION HELL

(Or movies we may see. One day.)

Edited by **Steve Holland**

Welcome to this month's Production Hell, SFX's regularly updated list of SF/fantasy movies in development. Please remember, though, that, while we strive for accuracy, many of the projects mentioned here will undergo substantial changes before going before the camera. For more info, check out the SFX Website at:

http://www.futurenet.co.uk

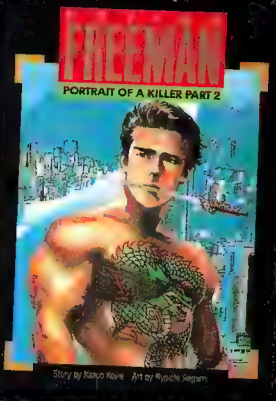
Key: Dir – Director; Scr – Scriptwriter; ExPrd – Executive Producer; Prd Producer; St – Starring.

ADDICTION (Fast Films) Dir Abel *(Bad Lieutenant)* Ferrara. Scr Nicholas St John. Prd Fernando Sulichin, Dennis Hahn. St Christopher Walken, Lili Taylor, Paul Caderon, Leonard Thomas, Annabella Sciorra. A New York University student becomes a (shock!) vampire. Began shooting in black & white in New York on 14 August 1994, and premièred at the Berlin International Film Fair in February 1995.

AREA 51 (IRS Media) Dir David Tickle. Scr Mike Gray. Prd Naofumi Okamoto. SF thriller, and music producer Tickle's first foray into movies. The film will also be backed by the Japanese company Apricot Entertainment. Based on the "real-life" incident of a UFO landing in the Nevada desert. Production should have started in June.

BURST (BFI) Dir Richard Heslop. Scr Tom Paine. Prd Polly Tapson. British low-budget affair about future London after a meteorite strike, where the inhabitants discover a new drug. Currently in development, although it's possible the movie may be one of a recently announced three-film co-production deal between the British Film Institute and the BBC.

CRYING FREEMAN (Freeman Productions) Dir Christophe *(Necronomicon)* Gans. Scr Gans, Thierry Cazals. ExPrd Taka Ichise. Prd Samuel Hadida, Brian Yuzna. St Mark Dacoscos, Julie Douglas, Tcheky Karyo, Rae Dawn Chong, Massayo Kato, Yoko Shimada, Byron Mann. This $9 million production began shooting in Vancouver on 5 October 1994 with Dacoscos as an artist who becomes the world's most ruthless assassin. Based on the Japanese manga strip and animated series, the film is due for release in August 1995, and features slight SF elements.



***Crying Freeman* should be a spy/SF/kung fu/shagging extravaganza!**

DAREDEVIL Dir Carlo *(Fluke)* Carlei. Scr Carlo Carlei, Chris Columbus. Prd Ben Myron, Tony Ludwig, Alan Riche. Based on the famous Marvel comic strip about a blind lawyer whose loss of one sense is compensated for by the heightening of all the others – a talent he uses to fight criminals

Step through our portal and Enter Another World

MAGIC The Gathering™

Mistral smiled, a cruel slash across her usually delicate face. The black stone - Jet - around her neck seemed to almost glint in the murk of the swamp. This game would be fun...

Starter Decks S.R.P. £5.99

Boosters S.R.P. £1.99

Simple Strategies...Infinite possibilities

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Wizards OF THE COAST

Magic: The Gathering, **Deckmaster** and **Wizards of the Coast** are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Card artwork by Richard Thomas & Melissa Benson

A brief audience with...

Harlan Ellison

He's one of science fiction's legends, with around 1,700 short stories, numerous books, one classic *Star Trek* episode, and now a brand new comic series under his belt. Not only that, but he's just as controversial and outspoken as ever, discovers a delighted **Steve Holland**...

If you know science fiction – even a little bit – chances are you've heard of Harlan Ellison. Perhaps you've read one of his short stories. Or one of his 62 books. Or maybe you've watched *A Boy and His Dog*, the post-apocalyptic adventure/horror movie based on one of his works. At the very least, you'll have seen his classic *Star Trek* episode "City on the Edge of Forever," where Kirk stops McCoy from saving Joan Collins, and for which he won the first of God-only-knows-how-many screenplay awards.

Now – alongside such duties as working on scripts for *Babylon 5* – Ellison has a new comic in the offing, *Harlan Ellison's Dream Corridor*, which remoulds his short stories in a fresh, perhaps more accessible, medium. I spoke to him about this, and film adaptions of his work, and found the celebrated Ellison opinion machine as switched on as ever...

First off, why a comic?

"It's really the most improbable dream in the world. You see, I have a number of abilities, but one of the talents I don't have is drawing. I cannot draw to save my life. So I'm hideously frustrated because in my head I can see exactly what I want, and I can't do it. With a comic I can describe what I see and the artist is able to draw it. Often they enhance the things I've seen.

"This is a comic absolutely dedicated to entertaining the ass off you. It's like an intelligent dog, like a Puli or a really smart Afghan, that just keeps jumping up on you, wagging its tail, and saying, 'Look, look, just look at this!'"

You sound as if you really like comics...!

"The mentors for this kind of comic are not last week's flavour of the week. They're guys like Will Eisner and Harvey Kurtzman, and all the people who informed my understanding when I was a kid – because I learned from comics. When I was a kid, I never thought that comics were inferior to other things. I was reading books and I was seeing movies, but I would pick up a comic book or a pulp magazine, and it was as valuable to me as picking up a copy of, I don't know, *Lorna Doone*. And I learned about how to be a good person from comics.

"Comics today just don't do that, particularly if you look at old heroes in the DC line. My God, they have corrupted them in the most tragic way, where you're ashamed to read a *Green Lantern* comic!

(Laughs.) I mean, it's one thing to show heroes who are flawed, who are weak sometimes, but there is a difference between human weakness and being a derango like Lobo."

So you hate the violent characters comics are doing at the moment?

"When you're young, anarchy seems noble. Anarchy seems the answer. And that's what they're doing: Creating characters like Lobo and Guy Gardner Warrior and the crazy Green Lantern. All of these characters are manifestations of anarchy, the rebellion of kids against their parents, and against society. It's always good to keep society shaken up, but unfortunately no substitute is offered. All it is is rampage.

"There's also a kind of insensitive disregard for human life and property in these stories that reflects the kind of thing you see in *Beverly Hills Cop* movies. Every time I see a car-chase in which the hero goes smashing through some car at an intersection, I think to myself: 'In that car is a 23 year old guy who has saved up all of his money to go to night school, and he was on his way to class, and now he's got a shattered spine, his legs are crippled, and he's going to be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.'

"These kind of things have repercussions in the real world... By constantly showing them in this casual way you get kids who simply do not understand that if they aim a gun at someone and pull the trigger, someone's head will be blown off."

Do any of your stories just refuse to be adapted?

"I'll tell ya, I have been offered large amounts of money by people who want to make a movie of "Jefty is Five" – it's an award-winning, fairly linear story, but I am convinced it wouldn't adapt to a visual medium. I've had half-a-dozen different writers ask me if they could adapt it, and I have to say 'No' because it's just too abstract. If you remove the abstraction from my stories and do only the physical aspects, you wind up with the equivalent of a bad Stephen King movie, because the things that make his books such a delight are all the ancillary matters – the little things, all his insights into people. But these are dropped when you make a movie because all the producers want is bang, bang, bang, and let's have some severed heads here..."

"This a comic dedicated to entertaining the ass off you. It's like an intelligent dog, a Puli or a really smart Afghan, that just keeps jumping up on you, saying, 'Look, look, just look at this!'"

Harlan Ellison's Dream Corridor, *published by Dark Horse Comics, is available from comic shops now.*

and other unsavoury characters who never reach the courts.

ESCAPE FROM LOS ANGELES Dir John Carpenter. Kurt Russell looks likely to reprise his role as Snake Pliskin in Carpenter's next project, the follow-up to *Escape From New York*.

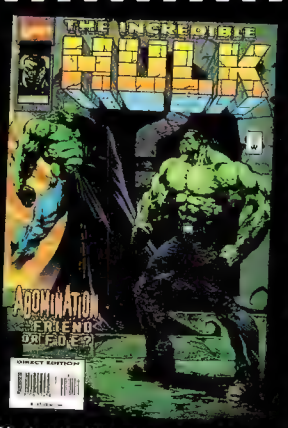
FAHRENHEIT 451 (Icon Productions/Storyline Productions) Remake of Francois Truffaut's 1966 movie version of Ray Bradbury's novel, this time scripted by Bradbury. His first draft is currently being re-written by Tony Puryear and is set to star Mel Gibson – who may have also been offered the director's chair. Warner will distribute in the USA.

FIST OF THE NORTHSTAR (Zeta Entertainment). Dir Tony Randel. Scr Randel, Peter Aitkins. St Gary Daniels, Costas Mandylor, Chris Penn, Isako Washio, Melvyn Van Peebles, Downtown Julie Brown, Malcolm McDowell. Based on Tesuo Hara's Japanese manga strip and subsequent animated series about the hero Kenshiro (Daniels), whose dead father (McDowell) spiritually guides him in his battle against evil. The joint Japanese/American production was shot in 30 days on a budget of $5 million. No release date yet.

FROM HELL (Touchstone) Alan Moore's meticulous examination of the Jack the Ripper legend has been optioned by Touchstone for $50,000 against a purchase price of around $500,000. Terry Hayes is writing the screenplay. Occasional flashes forward in time (just about) make it SFX material.

INCREDIBLE HULK (Universal). Scr John Turman. Prd Gale Anne Hurd *(Aliens, T2)*. Is currently in development, with no cast or start date on the horizon. Could still be the first Marvel related project off the blocks though.

INDEPENDENCE DAY (20th Century Fox) Dir Roland Emmerich. Scr Emmerich, Dean Devlin. ExPrd Roland Emmerich, Ute Emmerich. Alien invasion tale by the team who produced the surprise hit of 1994, *Stargate*, picked up by Fox in February 1995. Expected to go into production this Summer, with a 4 July 1996 release date already pencilled in.



Vast potential for new *Hulk* film – *if* it escapes the curse of Marvel.

THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU (Ed Pressman/New Line) Dir Richard Stanley. Scr Walen Green, Michael Hare, Richard Stanley. Prd Ed Pressman. St Marlon Brando, Samuel L Jackson. This new adaptation of the HG Wells novel began shooting in Queensland, Australia, in May. Bruce Willis was said to be in negotiation to co-star.

A KID IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT (Trimark) Dir Michael (*Mr Nanny*) Gottlieb. St Joss Ackland, Thomas Ian Nicholas, Kate Winslet. A little league player ends up in the court of Arthur via a time warp and ends up doing his best for King and country.

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Dwarf gets bigger

With the long-awaited third *Red Dwarf* novel, *Last Human*, lining bookshelves across the country, and the seventh series of the TV show now just getting under way, everything looks very rosy indeed for *Dwarf* fans. **John Campbell Rees** caught up with co-creator Doug Naylor at a recent book-signing in Cardiff...

First, a few facts. *Red Dwarf* is BBC 2's highest rating and longest running sitcom, regularly drawing in audiences of over seven million. It's won all sorts of awards, including an international Emmy in the popular arts category, and has sold around 1.5 million videos in the UK alone. It also shifts oodles of T-shirts, mugs, badges, toys, greeting cards and other items that SFX magazine would affectionately label "tosh," and is watched in countries as diverse as the United States and Sweden, Spain and Australia. All in all, not bad.

Red Dwarf has also spawned two internationally best-selling novels – *Red Dwarf: Infinity Welcomes Careful Drivers* and *Better than Life*, both written by the show's producing and directing team of Rob Grant and Doug Naylor. Now, at long last, a third title is here, but this time, rather unusually for *Red Dwarf*, it's been written solely by Doug Naylor – the team are trying their hands at solo projects these days. Oddly, it makes no attempt to stay strictly accurate to the TV shows either...

So, what's going on?

"It was always intended that the books would be a kind of parallel universe to the TV shows. We felt that running the two slightly different versions concurrently would be fun, which is why the books are a world unto themselves. It's that simple."

Why's the character of Kristine Kochanski been re-introduced?

"She was never a major character. To start with she was just a one-note romantic icon, but we felt bringing her back would be something people wouldn't expect, and it would be fun to see what happened throwing her into the mix. So we did it."

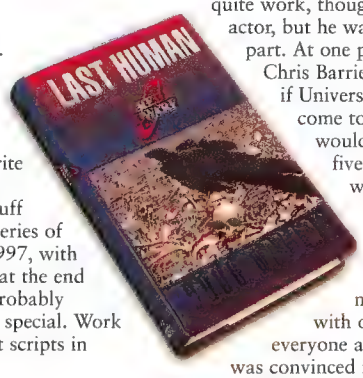
> "There are a number of [film] offers on the table at the moment from big American studios, and we're biding our time. To do it properly the movie needs to have a really big budget, and until it can command that we want to wait."

Chris Barrie has recorded talking books of the first two novels. Have you heard them?

"No, I haven't. Craig Charles is going to read *Last Human*, as we felt it was more of a Lister story."

***Last Human* has a very final feel. Is it the last book?**

"Oh, absolutely not. Rob has been saying since 1993 that he wants to write one, and I certainly want to write another. There'll be plenty of new TV stuff too. We're doing a series of eight episodes for 1997, with a Christmas special at the end of 1996, and then probably another series and a special. Work will start on the first scripts in about two months."



There was an attempt to make a US version of *Dwarf*. What happened?

"Well, we did the pilot, which didn't work well, but then the executive producer was fired and we were invited to take over. We recast two of the parts: Cat and Rimmer. We saw many male Cats that just didn't work, so we got a girl, Terri Farrel [now a regular on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*], for the part, as it seemed a good idea at the time. She was great, really funny.

"The Rimmer character didn't quite work, though. We had a good actor, but he wasn't right for the part. At one point we tried to get Chris Barrie, but the deal was if Universal paid for him to come to the States, he would have to sign a five-year contract, which he was reluctant to do. Anyway, we made a 15-minute pilot, mixing the new cast with old material, and everyone at Universal Studios was convinced it would go to a series of 26 episodes, but NBC said no at the final hour, because it only wanted to go with its own shows that season. Universal was very surprised and angry with that."

Given your experience with the US networks, would you like to be involved in a, presumably American, *Red Dwarf* movie?

"Oh yes. There are a number of offers on the table from big American studios, and we're just biding our time. To do it properly the movie needs to have a really big budget, and until it can command that we want to wait. Hopefully, what will happen is that the British *Red Dwarf* will be syndicated in the States – it's currently showing on local PBS stations – and, when people there get to know it well, we'll be able to use our cast."

Any other projects in the pipeline?

"There's a series called *Tales From The Weird City* that people are interested in, though it hasn't been sold yet. Rob and I wrote a script, and then we involved three other writers, so there are now four scripts. I suppose you could call it a humorous *X-Files*, though it first came about four years before *The X-Files* appeared on television. It's a strange and surreal series set in a city with very little water. It's like *Blade Runner* meets *The Twilight Zone*.

"There's also a futuristic SF film called *The Thursday Man* which we want to make. The script was written five or six years ago. Terry Jones [from *Monty Python*] is interested in producing it, which is great."

Last Human's *rated on page 91*

KILOBYTE (Savoy). Dir Chuck Russell. Virtual reality thriller. This could be the one for Stallone, who has been paid $20 million to star in *something*. Savoy is expecting Stallone to be hot property after his success in recent blockbusters.

LAND OF THE LOST (Walt Disney) Prd Sid Krofft, Marty Krofft. Peter (*Demolition Man*) Lenvok is working on a screenplay for a big-screen version of the 20-year-old dinosaur TV series.

MAI THE PSYCHIC GIRL Prd Ron & Russell Mael. Based on the manga series by Ryochi Ikegami. Seems to be back on line with Tim Burton directing. The last known version of the script was by Larry Wilson & Caroline *(Edward Scissorhands)* Thompson. The Mael brothers are probably better known as the pop group Sparks, who are reported to be producing the music.

MAN WITH THE FOOTBALL (Morgan Creek) Scr John Pogue. The football of the title is the US president's attache case, which contains the codes needed to launch a nuclear strike. It's stolen by a mad scientist who wants to reveal the horrors of nuclear armageddon by launching an attack on Washington DC.

MARS ATTACKS! Based on the classic early '60s trading cards, rights to which have been picked up from Topps by Tim Burton (who also picked up *Dinosaur Attacks!* at the same time). A script by Jonathan Gems is currently in the works. The project may even go ahead before *Catwoman*.

Crazed brain-in-fish-bowl alien from *Mars Attacks!*

MARY REILLY (TriStar) Dir Stephen Frears. Prd Norma Heyman. St Julie Roberts, John Malkovich, Glenn Close. Jekyll and Hyde from the housekeeper's point of view. The $38 million budgeted movie has recently gone back to the studio for the ending to be reshot after executives at Columbia were said to be less than enthralled, and there have been reports of on-set tension between the lead players.

Should still be released on 7 July in the USA.

THE MASK 2 (New Line) St Jim Carrey. Carrey started filming *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* in March 1995 and will reprise his role as Stanley Ipkiss this Summer. The latest storyline has The Mask going to Hawaii.

MEN IN BLACK (Columbia) Dir Les Mayfield. Scr Ed Solomon. ExPrd Steven Spielberg Prd Walter Parks, Laurie MacDonald. St Tommy Lee Jones. Based on the Malibu Comics series by Bill Spengler. Expected to start shooting in November 1995.

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE (Paramount) Dir Brian De Palma. Scr David Koepp, Robert Towne, Willard Huyck, Gloria Katz. ExPrd Paul Hitchcock. Prd Paula Wagner, Tom Cruise. St Tom Cruise,

"Don't quote us!"

Problem corner: *Princess of Mars* ground to a halt because none of the special effects maestros working on the project could figure out how to make the six-foot, four-armed insectoid warriors work. One or two, that was possible – but the script called for a whole army in a vast battle scene. Problem solved: In these post-*Jurassic Park* days, when computers can make dinosaurs come to life, the project is suddenly on the move again. Tom Cruise was being wined and dined, but his commitment to *The Vampire Lestat* may well prevent him from donning toga and sword to play John Carter of Mars. Keanu Reeves is moving up fast in the side lane, with Arnold Schwarzenegger just ahead in the lead role stakes...

Talking of big Arnie, one of the special effects crew being sounded out about the simian contingent in the up-and-coming *Planet of the Apes* remake was aghast when he heard that producer Oliver Stone wanted the apes to look intimidating next to the former Conan. Now those are going to have to be some *big* apes. Apparently, Roddy McDowell is happy to don prothetics again for a cameo, if the director feels there's room...

With *Flash Gordon* returning for a new big-screen outing, rumours abound that producer Peter Guber wants Jack Nicholson to play Ming the Merciless. The original director of the 1980 version, Nic Roeg, had cast the same actor, but when he was replaced by Mike Hodges, the cast was completely revamped. There seems to be no foundation in the rumour that Sharon Stone has been asked to be the new Dale, as the script hasn't even been finished yet...

Stone would probably be more attracted to playing a gutsy character, like *Modesty Blaise*, who is also due for cinematic reinterpretation, with *Pulp Fiction*'s Uma Thurman donning black catsuit and figure-hugging gun holster to play the title role. Hugh Grant is widely tipped to play her ever-faithful side-kick-cum-boyfriend Willie, provided he can cope with the character's cockney accent...

Monster bash!

The SFX Launch Party, Henson Creature Shop, Tuesday 23 May

There were monsters and aliens, mutants and cyborgs – and that's just behind the bar. **Matt Bielby** reports from the night before the morning after...

Jim Henson's Creature Shop has seen some weird things in its time – dinosaurs, dragons, trolls, ninja turtles and walking trees, to name just five – but rarely has it played host to quite so many weird and wonderful creatures as it did on the night of Tuesday 23 May. And never have so many of those creations been quite so out of it...

The event, of course, was the SFX launch party, held in a completely redressed Henson Creature Shop in Camden, North London, and sponsored by Staropramen (a new Czech beer from Bass) and Smirnoff, who sent along hundreds of bottles of ultra-exclusive Smirnoff Black, and a couple of transvestites to dish it out. Among those imbibing were Starfleet officers, Ferengi and Klingons from the Star Trek Fan Club at Page's Bar in Westminster, Freddie Kreuger (who indulged in an impromptu gun fight with a zombie at one point), a Vogon, RoboCop and an increasingly friendly Dalek. Human guests of note included a couple of Doctor Whos – Jon Pertwee and Peter Davison – and representatives from just about every film and TV company in the business.

The point of the party was twofold – to announce to the world that SFX exists, and to give everyone a good time. And we hope we succeeded on both counts. So hurrah for us, and roll on the next event. First birthday, anyone?

Emmanuelle Beart, Jon Voight, Jean Reno, Ving Rhames, Henry Czerny, Vanessa Redgrave, Kristin Scott Thomas, Ingeorga Dapkounaite. Cruise plays Jim Phelps, portrayed in the TV series (1966-73) by Peter Graves. The $40 million plus film, originally slated to shoot in the Autumn of 1994, began shooting on 13 March at Barrandov Studios in Prague and is currently at Pinewood until August, with a 22 November release pencilled in.

The script has already cost a fortune, with David Koepp being paid $1 million to rewrite and Robert Towne a further $1 million to rework it again. Paramount executives are said to have flown to the set to cut the film's budget before it got out of control.

MORTAL KOMBAT (New Line) Dir Paul *(Shopping)* Anderson. Scr Kevin Dronney. Prd Larry Kasanoff. St Christopher Lambert (Rayden), Trevor Goddard (Kano), Linden Ashby (Johnny Cage), Bridgette Wilson (Sonya Blade), Robin Shou (Liu Kang), Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa (Shang Tsung), Talisa Soto, Kathleen McClellan.

Began a 12-week shooting schedule in Thailand on 15 August 1994, later moving to Los Angeles. This is the first project by Threshold Productions, run by Larry Kasanoff who worked with Lightstorm (James Cameron's company) on *Terminator 2* and *True Lies* (which he exec produced), a martial arts and sfx extravaganza based on the best-selling arcade game. Currently due out in August.

THE NUTTY PROFESSOR Dir Tom *(Ace Ventura)* Shadyac. Scr Barry Blaustein, David Sheffield. Prd Brian Grazer. St Eddie Murphy, Jerry Lewis. Remake of the classic comedy, originally to be directed by John Landis. Was due before the camera in November 1994. The script has gone through re-write after re-write, with Barry *(Coming to America)* Blaustein & David Sheffield (re-)writing the first draft; Lowell Ganz & Babaloo Mandel also re-wrote, as did Larry *(M.A.S.H.)* Gelbart, and (finally) Steve *(In Living Color)* Oedekerk.

Murphy goes through various transformations, from a very overweight professor to suave ladies' man, and also puts in a number of in-disguise cameos, but reportedly has deferred his usual approval rights to make the movie now his star status is on the wane.

RETURN TO JURASSIC PARK Michael Crichton has nearly finished writing the sequel, which Spielberg will produce via his DreamWorks.

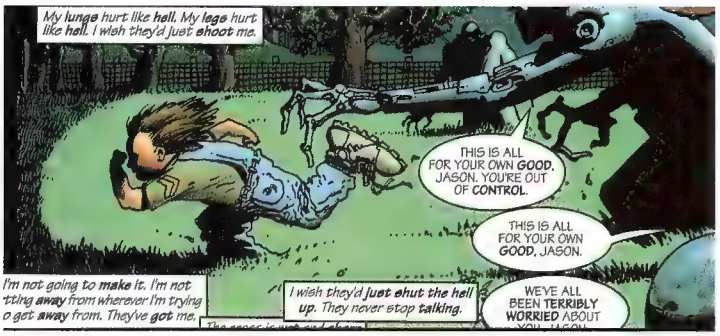
THE STARS MY DESTINATION Dir Paul *(Mortal Kombat)* Anderson. Prd Bernd Eichinger, Jeremy Bolt. $50 million budgeted adaptation of Alfred Bester's classic novel (aka *Tiger! Tiger!*). The film is set to roll this year, with David Giler & William Wisher working on the script.

STRAWBERRY FIELDS (Strawberry Fields/Amic) Dir/ExPrd Rea Tajiri. Scr Zach Whinestine. Prd Hank Blumenthal. St Suzy Nakamura, Heather Yoshimura, James Sie, Reiko Mathieu, Marilyn Tokuda, Peter Yoshida, Chris Tashima. $25 million movie about a virtual reality designer who's also a Beatles fan (and they'll be featuring heavily in the soundtrack). Began shooting 6 October 1994.

T. REX (Dyo Productions) Dir/Scr Jonathan Betuel. ExPrd Stefano Ferrari. Prd Sue Baden-Powell, Richard Abramson. St Whoopie Goldberg, Richard Roundtree, Armin Mueller-Stahl. Whoopie stars as a cop whose partner is the dinosaur Theodore Rex. She pulled out at one point, but returned later – and the film went into production in November 1994. It's currently in

Bad boy

The title of Simon Bisley's new comic strip venture – developed with comics god Frank Miller for GQ magazine – could just as easily describe the man himself, writes **Stuart Green**.


My lungs hurt like hell. My legs hurt like hell. I wish they'd just shoot me.
THIS IS ALL FOR YOUR OWN GOOD, JASON. YOU'RE OUT OF CONTROL.
THIS IS ALL FOR YOUR OWN GOOD, JASON.
I'm not going to make it. I'm not trying away from wherever I'm trying to get away from. They've got me.
I wish they'd just shut the hell up. They never stop talking.
WE'VE ALL BEEN TERRIBLY WORRIED ABOUT

Strange goings on in first episode of *Bad Boy*. Later instalments make it little clearer...

"I hate and totally dislike being what they call a megastar. What the fuck is a megastar? I never said I was. I never wanted to be one. I've always wanted to be underground and rootsy. I don't want these awards and crap like that. It means absolutely nothing to me at all, except okay sales."

But there's no getting away from it. Simon Bisley is simply the most famous and celebrated comic artist to emerge from the UK since Bolland and Gibbons were lured away by the Yankee dollar. Not bad considering how many great comics artists these islands produce every year.

Bisley's been a wanted man ever since he made his debut handling Pat Mills' *2000AD* stalwarts, *The ABC Warriors*, in the late '80s. His black-and-white robots-as-barbarians were a huge hit, though no one could foresee the impact his next series for the Galaxy's Greatest Comic would have.

With *Slaine*, The Biz really let rip. Told to use colour for the first time, he turned in a fully-painted, technicolour spectacular that recalled the '70s heyday of *Heavy Metal* magazine. On the surface, working against writer Pat Mills' fem-conscious script, it was a riot of over-exaggerated musculature and girls with huge breasts. Nothing like it had been seen before in British comics, and its influence was immediate. If you hate the murky style that's flooded the pages of many comics in the '90s, blame Bisley. It's his fault.

"People ripped me off to such an extent that I see pictures made up of bits and pieces of my own. They'll even copy mistakes I made in the background. A squiggle that wasn't right, they'll put that in there," he complains. And he has a point, although for a man who was clearly influenced in turn by Frazetta et al, his response seems a *little* churlish...

Since *Slaine*, Simon's work has been an impressive list of successful and important comics – the UK's all-time best-selling graphic novel, *Batman/Dredd: Judgement on Gotham* (Fleetway/DC), the all-out carnage of *Lobo* (DC), and umpteen covers for which he charges premium rates. Make no mistake, Bisley's blend of ultra-violence, black comedy and big guns is in hot demand.

Which is probably why he's now ended up alongside the equally heavyweight presence of writer Frank Miller in the pages of GQ. Miller made his name with *Daredevil*, *Elektra* and, in particular, his re-invention of Batman as an ageing psychopath for the brilliant *Dark Knight Returns* (DC), which inspired Tim Burton's movies. And, in the main, he's stuck to genre stuff ever since – the warring dystopia of the Martha Washington saga, the Mickey Spillane influenced *Sin City*, and the movies, *RoboCop 2* and *3*.

With Miller and Bisley involved in the GQ project you might expect something along the lines of Miller's collaboration with Geof Darrow, the exceptionally violent *Hard Boiled* – and so did Simon. "I always imagined myself doing a Batman or some other superhero-type character with Frank," he admits.

But *Bad Boy* is nothing like you'd expect. In the first three-page episode of the 12 that'll appear in GQ over the next year, a 10-12 year old boy called Jason is seen running across moonlit fields, away from what look like a platoon of robot Judge Deaths wearing Nazi stormtrooper helmets. "This is all for your own good," they hiss. Inevitably, he is caught, but before we can learn what horrible fate the bad guys have in store, the kid wakes up in hospital suffering from total amnesia, sure of only one thing – that he wants a cigarette.

There are few hints as to where the story's heading, but even Simon isn't sure: "I originally asked Frank to come up with some strange, obscure kind of story that no one could understand, and that's what he's done. I'm drawing it and I don't know what's going on."

Simon's new style is even more interesting – simple, clear lines that leave room for the background detail he's so often omitted in the past. "It's important to me to bring comics back to how they were in the old days. I'm sick of doing damned muscles, you know. I think it's had its day."

Objets d'arse

Horrid *The Making of Star Trek: The Next Generation* Trading Cards

What are they?
A set of 100 trading cards featuring exclusive behind-the-scenes photos of *The Next Generation*. They cover just about every aspect of production, from script conferences to special effects, from editing to seating arrangements to waiting outside the studio doors for the red light to go out. They were issued in the middle of last year, and were only available from a few specialist shops in the UK. Thank goodness.

Why are they cool?
Er... You've got us there. Well, okay, they *were* stylishly and expensively produced, and two of the photos *were* vaguely interesting...

Why are they sad?
Because they're so dull. Mindnumbingly dull. Just about the most boring item ever in the history of spin-off merchandising.

Gosh! Just imagine! You buy your latest pack, rip it open, and there's that picture of a load of director's chairs you've been waiting for to complete your collection. Or maybe you were after that fat bloke reading through the scripts? Or perhaps you've always wanted to see people who failed auditions for bit parts? The account sheets? Or key grips twiddling their nuts? Etc...

Verdict
As an entire set they do exert a morbid fascination, but surely no-one would ever be bothered to actually collect them? And, let's face it, you're never going to find anyone to swap cards with. (We hope.)

Dave Golder

***T.Rex* uses man-in-suit effects based on the *Dinosaurs* TV show.**

post-production for a Christmas 1995 release.

TALES FROM THE CRYPT PRESENTS "BORDELLO OF BLOOD" (New City Prods). Dir Gilbert Adler. Scr Bob Gale, Robert Zemeckis, A L Katz, Gilbert Adler. ExPrd Robert Zemeckis, Joel Silver, Richard Donner, David Giler, Walter Hill. Prd Gilbert Adler, A L Katz. St Corey Feldman. Production began in Vancouver on 11 May.

UNFORGETTABLE (MGM/Dino De Laurentiis Co.) Dir John (*Red Rock West*) Dahl. Scr Dahl, Rick Dahl, Bill Geddie. ExPrd Andrew Lazar, Bill Teitler. Prd Martha De Laurentiis, Dino De Laurentiis. St Ray Liotta, Linda Fiorentino, Peter Coyote, Christopher McDonald, David Paymer, Kim Catrell, Kim Coate. Scientist Fiorentino creates a drug which enables the user to experience another's memories – Liotta uses it to discover who murdered his wife. Began shooting in Vancouver on 18 April.

WITCH HUNT (HBO Pictures). Dir Paul (*Cat People*) Shrader. Scr Joseph (*Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*) Dougherty. St Dennis Hopper, Penelope Ann Miller.

X-MEN (Fox) Scr Andrew Kevin Walker. Prd Richard & Lauren Schuler-Donner. ExPrd Stan Lee, Avi Arad. Due out in the Summer of 1996. This isn't the first time round for *The X-Men*, once mooted by Carolco with a script by *Total Recall*'s Gary Goldman and possible interest by James Cameron as director.

Wolverine, the most popular X-Man, and a natural for the movies.

THE ZEN DIFFERENTIAL Rights to William Gibson's follow-up to *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, were picked up by Atlas Entertainment/Turner Pictures.

ZEN, INTERGALACTIC NINJA (Sceneries Entertainment/WD&P) Dir Brian (*Reanimator*) Yuzna. Scr Chris Solimine, based on characters created by Steve Stern & Dan Cote in 1987. Prd Philippe Diaz. ExPrd Mark Freedman. Filming, due to start in December of last year, was delayed because of a fourth script re-write. Though producers are still optimistic it'll be out by Christmas 1995.

Smirnoff Black is the coolest way to drink Vodka. Made by Smirnoff's own master distiller in Moscow, it should be drunk neat, frozen, straight from the freezer or over ice - but always CHILLED. And if you want to know why you should drink Smirnoff Black - just ask some friends...

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Gbenga - model, dancer, and singer with Masaai

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Betty Buggaloo and Celeste West - fabulous Smirnoff hostesses

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Fiona Cartledge - owner, Sign of the Times, Covent Garden

"There is always room in my life for the things that tickle me."

Clare Grogan - actress, tv presenter, all round fab Scots babe

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I STAND FOUR-SQUARE FOR JUSTICE. I STAND FOR DISCIPLINE, GOOD ORDER AND THE RIGID APPLICATION OF THE LAW - AND GRUD HELP ANY LIMP-WRIST LIBERALS WHO SAY DIFFERENT.

THE PEOPLE, THEY KNOW WHERE I STAND. THEY NEED RULES TO LIVE BY - I PROVIDE THEM. THEY BREAK THE RULES, I BREAK THEM. THAT'S THE WAY IT WORKS. THE PEOPLE LIKE IT THAT WAY. THEY NEED TO KNOW WHERE THEY STAND.

RIGHTS? SURE, I'M ALL FOR RIGHTS. BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF ORDER. THAT'S WHY I LIKE TO SEE THAT STATUE OF JUDGEMENT STANDING THERE, TOWERING OVER LIBERTY. KIND OF A SYMBOL. JUSTICE HAS A PRICE. THE PRICE IS FREEDOM."

JUDGE DREDD

FROM "AMERICA", PART 1, BY JOHN WAGNER.
JUDGE DREDD: THE MEGAZINE, VOL 1, NO 1

Lawgiver!

The Judge Dredd Chronicles

BATMAN FOREVER LOOKS WONDERFUL – BUT IT IS, AFTER ALL, ONLY A SEQUEL. CASPER'S A LIGHT COMEDY, APOLLO 13 MORE SCIENCE FACT THAN SCIENCE FICTION, AND WATERWORLD, BY ALL ACCOUNTS, A DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN. NO, THERE'S ONLY ONE BIG SUMMER FILM THAT THE ENTIRE SFX TEAM CAN'T WAIT TO SEE – AND IT IS, OF COURSE, JUDGE DREDD. BUT WILL IT BE WORK OF GENIUS, OR A TRAVESTY THAT'LL LEAVE THE FANS FUMING? JOIN **MATT BIELBY** AND OTHERS FOR THE INSIDE STORY...

There can't be too many comics fans who can claim to have dragged their favourite character – kicking and screaming – to the big screen, but Charles Lippincott is one of them. Not that it hasn't been a bloody struggle. The story of *Dredd*, the movie, is an 18 year odyssey – almost as old as the character himself, in fact – that's worked its way through at least five or six different scripts, as many directors, a couple of stars, one writer's strike and wall of indifference from much of the Hollywood community. Still, it's with us now, one of the Summer's big movies, and the man we've got to thank for it all is Charley, an American movie publicist who bought a copy of *2000AD* – the comic where Dredd first appeared – in 1977, and has been a fan ever since.

Take one look at Dredd and it's easy to see what's so appealing. He's an interesting character – created by British writers and a Spanish artist, but plonked in a futuristic America, where the human race is crowded into a handful of gigantic "Mega Cities," marshalled by the Judges. Yes, there was a lot of *Dirty Harry* in there to start with – Dredd's part of a long tradition of ultra-hard cops – but his location was gloriously original. Mega City One – a giant urban sprawl of the future, packed with billions of people and covering most of the Eastern seaboard of the US – sprung into being, almost fully formed, as a stage on which the absurdities of future life could be played to the full. *Dredd's* ostensibly an all-American subject, yet it's shot through with a very British sense of black humour, and it's the combination which makes it so special.

So when Charles Lippincott (who earned his reputation marketing *Star Wars* in the late '70s, and later worked on *Alien, Flash Gordon, Blade Runner* and *Dick Tracy)* picked up his first *2000AD* comic – around six month's into the title's run – he knew he'd hit on something big. The potential was obvious, but it was only when he returned to England for work on *Alien* that he really started to pay attention to the storylines and, most importantly, the ominous figure of Dredd.

"At that time, the 'Cursed Earth' story was running, and I loved it," he enthuses. "Brian Bolland was drawing a lot of it, switching back and forth with Mike McMahon, and I started going to Forbidden Planet to pick up copies. Every time I was in London over the next few years I'd buy *2000AD*, and by 1980 or so I'd decided I really wanted to do a *Judge Dredd* film."

At first, IPC, who published *2000AD*, didn't seem too interested in the proposition, ignoring assorted letters sent by Lippincott's lawyer expressing interest in the property. By 1983, however, headway was being made – the rights to a *Dredd* movie project had reverted to IPC from a British film-maker who'd held them for some time – and Lippincott spent another year negotiating with the company and its law firm. Not that he knew exactly what he'd do with the rights once he'd got them, of course...

"At the time, science fiction films generally weren't being produced by the large film studios," explains Lippincott, "but by individuals like Lucas and Spielberg. My priority was just to get hold of the rights, and then decide what to do with them – most likely take them to someone who had some money. The trouble was, when I eventually did get them, I couldn't persuade people to even look at it."

And that's the way it remained for years, with Charley touting the project around all the better-heeled LA producers until '86 – when he struck gold. Ed Pressman, well known for his work on the first *Conan* film and, recently, *The Crow,* was interested in co-producing. "Not that either of us thought it would take quite so long," sighs Lippincott.

For a while, things moved on apace, and the film could actually have been made in the late '80s if it hadn't been for the arrival of a certain brushed aluminium "future of law enforcement."

"*RoboCop* really backed us up, because it was too similar to *Judge Dredd* in many ways," admits Lippincott. "The creators of *RoboCop*

Font: Swirly Typographix

Patrolling the mean streets of Mega City One: This is one of our first images of the Judges from the film. Note neat new Lawmaster bikes, and revamped – but still great – uniforms.

had put a lot of *Judge Dredd* into it, and a fair amount of *Rogue Trooper* [another *2000AD* character]. The other thing was that *RoboCop* was a near future story, which meant they could make it for $13 million or so, whereas doing *Dredd* properly would cost a lot more. People saw *RoboCop* and assumed we could do a version of *Dredd* for a similar amount, which we perhaps could have, but it would have forced us to do something like the 'Cursed Earth' story – which is set in a radioactive desert – to get around the money thing."

The arrival of RoboCop wasn't the only stumbling block, however. There were still a number of other obstacles to overcome too, the most pressing ones being to find a director and a writer. A trail of potential writers and writer/directors duly started passing through Ed Pressman's office, all pitching ideas about the best way to turn *Judge Dredd* into a screenplay. This threw up a whole new series of problems, mostly arising from the mountain of material each of them had to wade through – *2000AD* had been going for over ten years at that point, and with a story a week, plus numerous annuals and specials, there was a lot of *Dredd* to research. And, unlike a Superman or a Batman, there was no obvious starting point either...

"Those two have very strong origin stories," Charley explains. "The Superman story is one of the best known origin stories ever told. It's been re-published so many times most people, even the ones who don't read comic books, know exactly what happens. The *Judge Dredd* story isn't as well known... His origin has never really been told."

For a long while, a succession of writers toyed with the idea of centring the story on Judge Death – a nightmare Judge from another dimension who decides all crime is committed by the living, so life itself must be a crime, and sets out to put that to rights. Not exactly suitable for a family audience.

"There was a whole script dealing with Judge Death, written by an English writer, who almost did a literal translation of the Judge Death comics," Charley recalls. "But if you do Judge Death that way it's probably X-rated material. It was definitely over-the-top in violence and gore. The other problem is that a female Psi-Judge, Anderson, is actually the hero of that story, in that she's the one who saves Mega City at the end. What we really wanted was a story where Dredd was the undisputed hero."

Popular evil-doer Judge Death was expected to star. Not so...

All in all, five or six basic scripts, plus assorted never-developed treatments, were written over the years, at least one – and therefore the whole project – being interrupted by a big Hollywood Writer's Guild strike. An early Charles Lippincott treatment had Dredd's evil clone-brother Rico as the villain, then there were two Judge Death scripts – the literal translation of the villain's first comic appearance, and another which tossed the character into an original story also involving the Angel gang – plus a few more.

So far, though, there's been no mention of John Wagner and Alan Grant, the two writers of the weekly *2000AD Dredd* strip, and the

The Rookie

Against all the odds, talented young British film-maker Danny Cannon talked himself into the director's chair for Judge Dredd. Does this guy have the gift of the gab or what, asks **LA Turner**...

"For people who've been aware of *Dredd* all their lives, I'm sure they'll have criticisms," says 27 year old Danny Cannon, the surprise choice for director on *Judge Dredd*. "Especially in Britain. But our responsibility was to introduce Dredd to the rest of the world, and therefore our story concentrated on who or what he is, and what he represents – and then made him question that."

A dedicated fan of *2000AD*, Cannon reckons that, having laid the foundations, a second *Dredd* film would be more fun to make. "But for this film," he stresses, "we needed to know and explain the world in which he lives, and how Dredd works, and in an hour-and-a-half it's difficult."

The main aim of this initial *Dredd* movie, then, is to introduce the man and his metropolitan beat: Mega City One.

"We had to present a chaotic, intense melting pot society," explains Cannon, "where people like Dredd are necessary, and create this legend called Dredd, this unforgiving pillar of the law – and then have great fun in smashing that, and saying there is corruption, inevitably."

The story is based on the "Return of Rico" storyline (from issue 30 of *2000AD*), where Dredd is framed for murder by his evil cloned-brother, here played by Armand Assante.

"We put the shoe on the other foot," Danny says. "How could Dredd survive as a criminal? And who put him there and why? In the meantime, the city is in chaos and somebody is exploiting that."

He's got an undeniable passion for *Dredd*, has Cannon, a passion that helped

Danny Cannon (right) with an impressively meaty-looking Stallone on the set of *Dredd*.

this virtual newcomer clinch the job of a lifetime. Following his London gangster film, *The Young Americans* (1993), Cannon spent time touting himself around Hollywood to discuss future projects.

"I actually went in to meet Andy Vanja, our executive producer, about a different film," he explains, "but I said to him 'You have *Judge Dredd*, just hear me out...' and I pitched and pitched and pitched..."

Whatever it was he said, Vanja liked it. The big problem now was that not everyone was convinced Cannon could handle a project of this size.

"The pitches went on every day for about three weeks," he groans. "I needed to convince everybody that I could make the film I was describing. You can't just go into a film and say 'I want to do this, I want to do that...' Never pitch anything you can't deliver!"

Eventually, however, Vanja, Pressman, Lippincott and the rest said 'Okay, we believe you,' and Cannon found himself sat in a room with a production designer and a couple of illustrators, wall-papering the place with images of the story he wanted

"I think I overwhelmed him... The way I was motivated to do this," says Cannon on working with the imposing ex-Rocky. By all accounts, the two learned a mutual respect on-set.

The big challenge of this first *Judge Dredd* movie was to make Dredd, his bizarre enemies, and his incredible world believable. "And in an hour-and-a-half it's difficult," says Cannon.

to tell. "What I was trying to bring to the film was an emotional value," Danny says. "Yes, there were going to be fireworks. Yes, it was going to be fun. Yes, there was going to be adventure – but why are we going to care? You know, you have to be into the characters and care about their dilemmas. That's what I wanted to bring to the film."

The fact that Danny is a *Dredd* fan was, he reckons, very important – not only when it came to getting the job, but also when it came to doing justice to the character himself. A fan would have more reason to be true to the comics and to respect the cherished images held by loyal fans.

"*Judge Dredd* was with me since I was nine years old," smiles Cannon. "I loved the characters, and I wanted to involve all of that boldness and colour into something where you actually felt an emotional connection. And I think that's what we've done. That's the only time you can have real fun; when you care about what's happening to people.

"Technique is something I've never had a problem with. Fireworks are sometimes the easiest thing to do, and there's not much you can't do these days. It was always the emotional foundations of the story that were going to be paramount."

THE WHOLE SCRIPTING PROCESS eventually lasted nearly a year, right up until shooting began, with much argument about how grim the film should be continuing right to the end.

"I think Hollywood's afraid you're going to make these things too dark," Danny explains. "Sure, this was a fun film that we wanted kids to respond to – but at the same time I kept drawing us back to the emotional content, and the story we were trying to tell. This is a fascist policeman in a right-wing society who kills people. I found it very important that those values are questioned.

"The problem was, the producers were starting to feel that this was going to be a difficult film to understand. Of course, it isn't! It's straightforward. In the end, though, I think the painstaking detail we injected into all of this, and the energy we brought to it, pays off to produce a really dense, complex action-adventure."

One of the decisions Cannon wasn't able to change, however, was the casting of Judge Dredd himself. Stallone, who owns part of the film, was already in the role before Cannon joined the project. Did this ever conflict with the fan in him's vision of who the ideal Dredd should be?

"I remember when I was nine years old, and Clint Eastwood was the only Dredd anyone could ever think of. Other than that, the way he was drawn and proportioned... Well, no man looks like that!" he laughs. "But Stallone's done a good job. When he did the voice, took the stance and stuck his chest out..." – Cannon imitates Stallone, putting his chin up and sticking his own chest out – "it was, 'Yeah, it's Dredd. It's Dredd.' And doubt went completely out the window when he stood up, put his hands on his hips and just stared at me.

"The other thing is, during filming he was as passionate about the project as me, you know. I mean, he comes at you with a load of ideas, sometimes a little too late, but I love it. I love the challenges he sets me. He was knee-high in comic books, always wanting to talk about it. And I think I overwhelmed him... The way I was motivated to do this, how inspired I was.

"We went at it everyday. Sometimes screaming at each other; sometimes slamming doors; sometimes hugging each other; sometimes crying. We had a good time shooting the film!"

Dredd was budgeted at $70-80 million – a lot of money, but nothing like the cost of *Waterworld*. Was there ever the fear that things were going to spiral out of control?

"No, but we couldn't play with it," Cannon says. "These days, there are a load of films over $100 million, but we said what the budget was going to be and that's what we came in at. I'll be arrogant enough to say that we're the best-looking film out there this Summer, and probably the cheapest of the ones we're competing against too.

"Look at this!" – he points at a clip from the film – "We've got a futuristic world with flying traffic! I can't even begin to tell you what's in this, but anybody who knows the comic should know that we live up to all of their expectations.

"That said, I'm a terrible critic, and unfortunately so much of the job on a film like this is controlling a thousand potential nightmares, and controlling that chaos outweighs creativity. So, yeah, sometimes I'm really proud when I see how beautiful, bold, brash, bizarre and funny this film is. And other times I think, I'm only 10% there. And I just hope people understand the undertaking of this film logistically and cut me some slack."

> **"Me and Sly went at it every day; sometimes screaming at each other; sometimes slamming doors; sometimes hugging each other; sometimes crying..."**
>
> **Danny Cannon, director**

British actor Chris Adamson plays Mean Machine Angel. Don't get him on "four"!

One of the centrepieces is a spectacular chase through Mega City One on Dredd's flying Lawmaster bike.

"It's funny how that came about," Danny laughs, "because at one point they still said to me it [the script] lacks dynamism, and I said, 'What about a flying bike chase?' And we did the sequence on the storyboard. We didn't write it, we drew it. We said: 'What about this?', they said: 'Great, how much is that?', and I said: 'I'll make it as cheap as possible!'

"That said, it's not my favourite part of the film. I really enjoy the evil character of Rico the most. Armand Assante is a brilliant actor, and I love the scene when we first introduce him."

Since making *Dredd*, Hollywood has been banging on Cannon's door with similar-sized projects in mind. Is he interested? Of course.

"I think after *Dredd* I can do anything. The truth is, I haven't really enjoyed many comic book films, but I've always admired them. I thought the first *Superman* was terrific, and I liked *Dick Tracy*. I think good things have been achieved before. But you have to go out there thinking you can top them all."

Armand Assante as Rico: "I love the scene where we first introduce him," says Cannon.

Stallone as a uniformed Dredd shows off the awesome Lawgiver handgun, redesigned from the comics. New, too, is the fact that Dredd rarely wears his helmet – a given in *2000AD*.

"I wanted to introduce him as a big icon, a huge mythical figure," says writer Bill Wisher of Judge Dredd. He certainly got the "big" right – Stallone is in amazing physical shape...

people who'd done more than anyone else to develop the Dredd character and his world. Why weren't they involved?

"Well, at first IPC asked me to stay away from Wagner," Charley explains, "but later that relaxed a bit, and we talked to John and Alan Grant. The thing was, Alan had it in his mind that they should be paid for pitching their script outline – which isn't done in Hollywood unless you're an incredibly famous writer – and it never really worked out.

"Anyway, in my experience it's hard for comic writers to write good film scripts – it's just a different discipline. Someone's wanting to do a film with Frank Miller at the moment – and he's about as good a comic writer as you get – but from what I've heard his script for *RoboCop 2* wasn't very good at all..."

THE MAN WHO EVENTUALLY GOT TO GRIPS WITH *Judge Dredd*, and wrote the script that forms the basis of the movie, was William Wisher. "His script was good because it tried to set up Dredd as a character," says Charley. "You didn't just get this two-dimensional guy who stayed two-dimensional throughout. You actually had a chance to see him grow and become a hero.

"The other good thing about his script was that it started to go behind the scenes and tell you what the Judges were all about. Without explaining that, how do you differentiate them from the regular police? That's very important. It also set up Mega City One, and showed how future urban areas was different from today's urban areas. So the story addressed three important factors, and after that everything else could be added to make the plot richer for the audience."

In his comic incarnation, *Judge Dredd* has always been hidden behind the visor of his helmet, a single-minded enforcer of the Law, whose human qualities are minimal. In *2000AD*, stories run between six and eight pages a week, so naturally they concentrate on action and story rather than characterisation. It's a formula that works well in that medium, but doesn't translate too easily to a mass audience movie.

"The audience must empathise with the main character in the film," Charley says categorically. "If you don't have a character that you can empathise with, it isn't going to work. In the comics, Dredd has this imposing quality about him where he seems to be impenetrable, and that's one of the fascinations for a good deal of Dredd's audience.

"However, when people say that the comic book Dredd never changes, they're wrong. He has changed in a number of important stories. There was the whole 'Democracy' thing, for instance, and his decision to give up being a Judge and take The Long Walk out into the Cursed Earth, events that then led into 'Necropolis.'

"To get someone like Sly involved in a project like this," adds Charley, "you need to get his character to do something, to develop – and getting someone like Sly involved is of paramount importance. You simply couldn't do a film this expensive without a major star."

STALLONE'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PROJECT began when Andy Vanja, who runs a company called Cinergi, saw a

Diary Of A Mad Citizen

"SO, D'YOU WANNA BE A FILM EXTRA FOR JUDGE DREDD?" ASKED THE NICE LADY. **SIMON LEWIS** NEVER COULD SAY NO...

Meet Simon Lewis: *Star Trek* fan, *Casualty* extra, and now – Mega City One citizen!

"You've got two days on *Judge Dredd*," said Louise from the extras agency. "Just one thing – go looking the part, as scruffy as possible, or they won't let you in on the set."

Oh what the hell. I'm game...

MONDAY 17 OCTOBER 1994

4.15am

Feature film call times are uniformly inhuman, and *Dredd* was no exception – I have to be at Shepperton for 7am, "looking the part." Wearily, I smear myself with grime and dress in my ritually-distressed T-shirt and jeans, leather jacket, and boots that once belonged to a Klingon. Yawning, I slouch to the Central Line tube, blearily wondering why all the other passengers seem to be keeping a respectful distance.

7am

I've teamed up with Eoin Clarke and Mike Byrne, two other Mega City One citizens, and we're signing in at Shepperton. The set we'll be working on is obscured by trees and scaffolding, but we're too cold and hungry to care. "Breakfast," we moan faintly, and are promptly pointed towards the costume department...

7.30am

Costume have cleared us – I've had straps, zips and a fetching studded dog-collar attached – and we're in make-up. "What happened to you, then?" the lady wants to know. "Did you fall over in the car park?" I mutter something about looking the part or not getting the job, and she laughs. "Oh, we're going to have fun with *you*!"

One evil-looking scar down almost the entire right side of my face, two nasty-looking gashes and one bruised eye later and I'm still not quite there. "Clothes are too fresh," says the assistant, ripping my already fairly knackered T-shirt and rubbing in some Fuller's Earth. "Well, what

"Brrr, it's cold," moans Simon. Not that anybody closely involved in the film cares very much. It's his job – and the jobs of bus-loads like him – to simply stand there in the cold...

***Blade Runner*, eat your heart out. *Dredd*'s ground-level street scenes look very much like the familiar, neon-lit home of Rick Deckard and co. – but they're much, much bigger. And *Blade Runner* never had such amazing, breath-taking effects shots of an entire cityscape either...**

"The first sight of Mega City One is breathtaking. Over half a mile long, it's like a real city, with streets, a bank, cinemas, shops and a red light district."

Simon Lewis, extra

do you think?" asks my favourite make-up lady. I growl menacingly.

8am
We eat a sumptuous breakfast in the giant marquee where we'll spend most of our time when not working. A frankly bizarre mixture of judges, bureaucrats and citizens are sharing breakfast here, and our fellow diners tell us what we're in for. "You're lucky the sprinklers aren't being turned on today," one says, while all agree that the set is "awesome." Well, it should be, at £6 million. "Have you noticed how the Judges are keeping to themselves?" observes Eoin, only half-joking...

9.30am
The first sight of Mega City One is breathtaking. Over half a mile long, it's like a real city, with streets, a bank, cinemas, shops – and even a red light district. The streets are covered with a layer of water, and assorted futuristic vehicles line the kerb. Steam issues from vents under the street. *Blade Runner*, eat your heart out...

7.45pm
We've wrapped for the day and my feet are killing me. Today we shot literally the last five minutes of *Dredd* – we've obediently surged, applauded, growled and fought as instructed. It's been freezing – groups of extras have been huddling around the steam vents in the street all day and tempers have been fraying. Someone says this is deliberate – Danny Cannon is striving for authenticity here, and he wants his crowd as hostile as possible. It works. When Stallone finally appears on set about a third of the way through the day, the crowd's reaction to one of the world's top mega-stars is typically grumbling and English.

"Look, there's Stallone," says the guy next to me. "What a tosser..."

"The first sight of Mega City One is breathtaking," says Simon, and we know what he means. Everyone – but *everyone* – who visited the Shepperton set came back stunned.

Tuesday 18 October

4.15am
I'm going to be late, I know it... Happily, my Mega City dweller costume works wonders, and crowds of commuters part in front of me like the Red Sea before Moses. Madly, for a brief moment, I consider wearing this get-up every day...

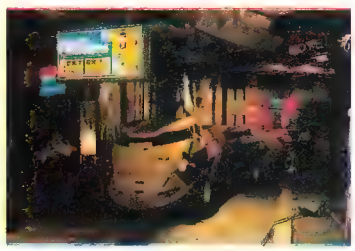
1.30pm
We break for lunch, following a tasteful little scene where Dredd blows away a yuppie motorist who's parked his red hover-car in a "no parking" zone – and is forced to pay the consequences.

I spend most of my time dodging unpredictable streams of armoured taxis, which soak you in ice-cold water if you don't dodge quickly enough.

Between takes, Mike, Eoin and I admire Dredd's parked-up Lawmaster bike. "Beats my Honda," sighs a citizen nearby.

4.30pm
An American TV crew is filming a "Making of..." piece for some show or other, and we're unceremoniously marched over to the steps of the Grand Hall of Justice at the far end of the set, where 20 or more of the most disgusting-looking citizens are gathered. Cannon and Stallone suddenly appear with a photographer and we realise they're taking this opportunity for a publicity shot. I'm placed somewhere near Stallone's left shoulder, and find the star endearingly goofy. "Okay, chins up! Let's have some attitude here," he drawls, and everyone mugs outrageously. "Now all you lot keep together in a group so I can find you later on, y'hear?"

The three of them wander off and I'm struck by something. "You know," I say out loud, "I didn't think he was meant to be that tall, but when you're around him he's absolutely enormous." "Charisma," says someone next to me, charitably. "No, stacked boots," comes a voice from the back. Obviously not a fan.



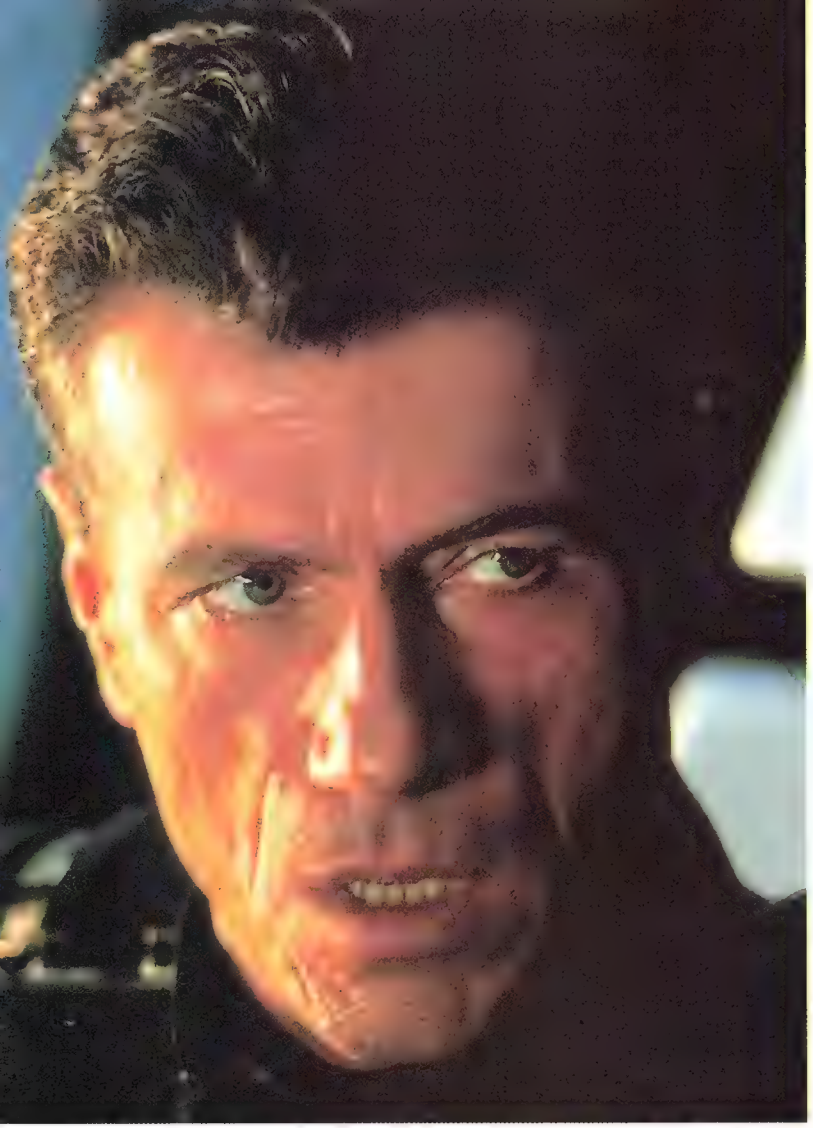
Among the shops: Geiger's Bazaar, where Rico pinches a neat toy from... *Ian Dury*?

6pm
The call comes again, but this time our group is ushered nearly 100 feet above the set to a heli-pad affair. Stallone fearlessly strides about the pad, directing his photographer. We cluster apprehensibly in a set of double-doors, eyeing the fragile-looking grille in the floor and the 100-foot drop. "Come on, spread out there," says Stallone. "It'll make the light falling on you look more interesting." He frowns. "Someone's missing. Where's Scar, the little guy?"

Unfortunately, I think he means me. The crowd parts and I find myself kneeling at Judge Dredd's feet wearing a studded dog-collar. Will my career survive this, I wonder? "Nothing personal," beams Stallone. "It's only a photo."

8.15pm
The final shot – and it's a wrap. We say our goodbyes and head for the studio coach that will take us back to London. One last chance for Mike, Eoin and I to clear carriages on the tube in our full *Dredd* get-ups – except for some reason the ticket inspector at Hammersmith is grinning at us. I think we've been sussed. "Been on anything good?" he smiles.

"*Judge Dredd*," I say, "and, yes, it's going to be great..."



Fans of the original comic will recognise Judge Griffin (Jurgen Prochnow) as a respected Judge. Filmgoers, however, will soon realise there's something rotten in the Mega City...

version of the Bill Wisher script and thought it would make a great vehicle for the star, who was looking for a project at the time.

"This has really become Sly's project," admits Lippincott. "He's been very loyal to the film – in fact, he's been the one who really wanted to keep it as close to the look of the original comics as possible. At one point, the script came away from the *2000AD* version of *Dredd*, but Sly insisted it return more to the comic character. And while no star would do the film and keep the helmet on all the way through, as some Dredd fans doubtlessly hoped, Stallone was happy with the idea that in the teaser trailers his face is never properly shown.

"Anyway, how can you really expect people to empathise with somebody who's going to be behind a mask all the time? Doesn't it look silly if other people are taking off their helmets and this guy is standing there with his on? And, why would you pay a star to do that? It's like saying, 'We've got X appearing in this movie, we've paid them millions of dollars – and you're never going to see their face!'"

So we've got Stallone as Dredd, and despite some fans' preference for Arnold Schwarzenegger – who was reported to be interested in the film at one point – Sly is one of the few actors working today who stands a chance of being convincing in the role. Out of interest, what happened to Schwarzenegger? Was he ever really into doing the film?

"Oh yes, he was definitely interested," explains Charley, "but this was around the time of *Last Action Hero*, when he was keen to try and play a nicer sort of hero. Dredd, being a pretty violent character, didn't fit in with that, but after what happened to *Last Action Hero* he may have changed his mind..."

THERE'S ONE THING ABOUT THE MOVIE VERSION OF *Dredd* that nobody involved tries to hide, despite the fact it's likely to raise the hackles of fans everywhere – this Dredd will be a much more emotional creature than we've seen before, especially with the helmet off. The film's structured so that, at first, the audience won't be sure if they like the authoritarian Dredd, but then – as the Justice system

The Long Walk

IT'S BEEN A STRUGGLE GETTING A WORKING SCRIPT FOR DREDD TOGETHER, AS EVENTUAL WRITER WILLIAM WISHER – ONE-TIME CO-SCRIBE OF TERMINATOR 2 – EXPLAINED TO **MATT BIELBY**...

"A few years before I'd even heard about the *Judge Dredd* project, I'd written a script for Ed Pressman based on the *Lone Wolf* and *Cub* comic books," explains William Wisher, "and though the film wasn't made, we'd got on very well. So when, maybe four or five years later, *Dredd* came up, I jumped at it.

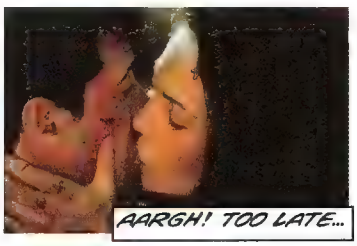
"Apparently, Charley Lippincott acquired the rights some ten or 12 years ago and they'd been working on it for years, but they'd never been able to get a script they liked. So when I arrived, we decided to start over from scratch..."

The Angel gang: From left, Junior, Pa and Link, all much changed from the comic.

So how *did* you start? Did they give you a stack of comic books and just say: "Here, read this"?

"Actually, that's pretty much exactly what happened," he laughs. "They gave me about a three foot pile of comic books and I just went through them – and very quickly ran across a storyline and character I thought we could use. It was the Rico/Dredd story, of course, and it struck me as being the best one to base the film on. Judge Death, of course, is a popular character, and we talked about using him, but in the end we all agreed that Death would be better for the

Here's the Mean Machine we know and love (art by Simon Bisley from *Batman/Dredd: Judgement on Gotham*). Amazingly, the movie version (Chris Adamson, far right) is spot on!



second or even the third film – if, of course, we ever get that far."

It's nice that Rico's an early *Dredd* storyline, from within the first six months or so of *2000AD*. The fans will like that...

"Yeah, it's nice in a way, because people who follow the comic book will realise that we've come in right at the beginning of the whole story, and that there's lots more to come."

Were you thinking all along "I hope the fans will like this"?

"Not really. I found the whole idea of Dredd and Dredd's world a fascinating one, but I felt that for a large audience it was a problem that there was such a grim, rather fascist hero at the centre of it. One of the things I wanted to do was make him appeal to as many people as possible, but without really changing him.

"You see, in the comic it's fun that he's quite unlikeable, but in a film you need him to be as likeable as possible to keep the audience with you. So I thought that if we use Rico, who's Dredd's alter ego, it would give us the opportunity to have Dredd look in this dark mirror and see himself. I thought that would humanise him nicely."

So you made your decision on what story to use pretty quickly?

"Well, it's been two or three years now since I went through all the comics, but the only other story I can recall us really thinking of was Judge Death – Death and Rico were the two villains I liked the most. You see, getting a good villain was one of the priorities. A lot of the other storylines just didn't seem big enough, or mythic enough. A lot of them were a bit silly, or more overtly comical, and I thought that won't do – that's not what we're after here."

Yes, Dredd has a lot of villains, but few of that stature – he tends to kill them off in one story, and then they have to get new ones in...

"Ha ha! That's true. Basically, we knew that this was going to be a very big budget film, and I was looking for something with mythic overtones that really felt like a large story, and this was one that was up to the job."

One thing that worried me when reading the novelisation of the screenplay (reviewed on page 92) is that Dredd comes across as rather thick. You seem to have him starting off not really understanding who he is, or what's going on around him...

"Well, at the beginning you don't know that they're clones, simply because I thought it was more interesting to play it as a grand mystery, so the revelation would shake Dredd right down to his toes. We decided Dredd shouldn't be aware that Rico was his clone for dramatic reasons. At first Dredd just thinks Rico is this guy who was a bad Judge, but then he realises they both come from the same stock. I think it plays really well."

But wouldn't they look exactly the same if they were clones?

"Well, yes, that's something we had to address. I thought the logic of it would be that the people who created Dredd and Rico would make sure that they didn't look alike, because they wouldn't want anyone else to know the truth. Sure, they're made from the same genetic base, but they tweaked it a bit. In my version of the story, Judge Griffin has secretly added a bit of his own DNA to the mix, so Rico is not just a clone of Fargo, as Dredd is, but he has some additional bad stuff too, which perhaps explains what went wrong. The funny thing is, as far as casting goes, Armand Assante and Stallone look a lot alike, so I thought that was a neat piece of casting which made it work a lot better."

In the comics Rico has just come back from prison on Titan and his face has been mutilated to enable him to breathe there or something...

"Yeah, we considered doing Rico like that, and thought that if he was a mutant it would solve some problems – like why Dredd and Rico don't look alike. The problem was, I also thought you'd begin to wonder whether he *used* to look like Judge Dredd – and, if so, why Dredd hadn't realised they must be related somehow much earlier on. The other thing was that it would have meant having our main villain in heavy make-up all the time, and we were thinking, 'Well, if we can get Armand Assante, he's such a fine actor you should be able to see his face properly!'"

You've got lots of other familiar characters from the comic in the film too. Was packing them all in a deliberate policy decision?

"I certainly wanted to use as many characters from the comic as I could. Hershey has been a regular in *Dredd* since very early on, and she was very familiar to the comic book readers.

"I also knew that Dredd was going to need someone to help him get to Mega City, and I wanted him to see it from a point of view he's never experienced before – as a perp who's being hunted. Fergie seemed like a character who could fit that role – he could help Dredd out a bit and he could show Dredd what it's like when the shoe's on the other foot.

"I know we changed Fergie a bit from the comic book character, and I hope I'll be forgiven for that, but I wanted to keep as close to the comics as I could. So I thought, rather than invent a different character, why not make Fergie a little smarter and a little more fun? Certainly, I couldn't find anyone like the character I needed from the comic book..."

Max Normal?

"He was just a little too broadly comic, I thought."

Your version of Fergie comes across as a sort of Joe Pesci type, like his character in *Lethal Weapon 2* or something...

"When I was writing the script it was before any of the casting choices were made, and I think in my mind I always saw Fergie as a bit like that, a bit of a cross between Danny De Vito and Joe Pesci – that sort of character. And I think Rob Schneider has fitted in really well, and made that character his own."

A lot has been said about the problems *RoboCop* caused, and how that effectively stopped the *Dredd* film from being packed with cultural parodies and so on. Were you instructed to try and avoid doing anything like *RoboCop* at all costs?

"We were obviously aware of *RoboCop* and discussed it from the very beginning. We also knew it was based on the *Judge Dredd* comic book, because the people who created the character told us! Eddie Neumyer, who wrote *RoboCop,* is a friend of mine, and over dinner we discussed it. *RoboCop* wasn't a copy of *Judge Dredd,* he said, but it was a definite influence. Anyway, we had a laugh about it and he said "Sorry about that!" But, of course, he made his film many years before this.

"Basically, I avoided doing broad, funny parodies of the real world, because we didn't want people to think of our film as just a variation on *RoboCop* – although some comparisons *are* inevitable."

It'll probably strike a lot of comic fans as a bit odd that Alan Grant and, in particular, John Wagner pretty much created *Judge Dredd* and his world, yet they've had little direct involvement in the film. What are your thoughts about that?

"Well, they probably wouldn't have wanted to, in the sense that everyone's a bit territorial about the things they've created, including myself. However, I think that comics and films are two different mediums, and the strengths and the skills you learn in one don't necessarily translate to the other. Comic books tend to be very short stories, almost like *haiku,* and films are much more like novels. And the forms require different skills. Some comic book writers may indeed be able to write very good screenplays, but as a general rule I don't think the things they're interested in lend themselves to huge novelistic formats."

Since you worked on the script, Steven de Souza and Danny Cannon have modified it and rewritten it. How do you feel about that?

"I think I wanted it to be a little more serious than it is now – I certainly saw it as a dark comedy with serious overtones, but now I think it's gone a bit more comic, and that's perhaps a good idea. It's still a parody of today's society and the way we're going. I still think it works very well. It's essentially the same piece, but a little broader and a little funnier than what I originally had in mind."

Finally, is there anything you're particularly pleased about in the film – any scenes you think work especially well?

"Ooh, that's hard. I like the idea of the Genesis lab, and Dredd and Rico returning to the place where they were born. I thought that was lovely. And I loved the Cursed Earth and the Angel gang and all that, and seeing what the world beyond Mega City is like, and how horrible it is. I mean, it's funny – it's supposed to be – but it's also vicious, and I think that worked out quite nicely.

"But the bit that really springs to mind are the opening scenes – the Block War and all that – because it shows you instantly what Dredd's world is about. Mega City is introduced through Fergie's eyes as he's paroled back into it, so you're seeing it as he sees it. In a very short space of time, an entire world is created – you see the angry citizens, the violence of it, you're introduced to Judge Dredd and you see how he clears the block out...

"I wanted to introduce him as a big icon, a huge mythical figure, then, straightaway, we see what he's actually capable of. You understand so much in a very short space of time. I was very happy with that."

> **"I know we changed Fergie a bit from the comic book character, and I hope I'll be forgiven for that, [but] I couldn't find the character I needed from the comics..."**
>
> William Wisher, scriptwriter

Diane Lane – famous in the early '80s for lead roles in stylish efforts like *Streets of Fire* and *Rumble Fish* – plays Judge Hershey, one of the few who still believe in the disgraced Dredd.

turns against him, and he's accused of a crime he didn't commit – the character starts to change, and his (gulp) human side comes to the fore.

"From the trial scene onwards you start to see the emotions," says Lippincott. "As in the comic books, he's meant to be the ultimate Judge – the one who totally believes in The Law – so we make him very similar to the *2000AD* character at the beginning, and then work from there. Until the trial, it's never sunk into his mind that there might be anything wrong with the Justice system, but then things really start to happen and he's forced to question himself. And that's our story."

Although this more human, questioning version of Dredd may worry comic fans, there's still plenty in the movie they're guaranteed to enjoy. Certainly, the film's depiction of Mega City One, the Justice department and so on appears to be spot on.

"In the comics, the Judges have taken power away from the people because the people aren't fit to govern themselves," explains Charley, "and we use the same premise in our story. When Mega City One was formed, and the Judge system set in place, the people didn't vote for it or anything. The world was simply in a dire situation, and the Judges – in wrestling power for themselves – took the only action that was viable to make sense out of the chaos and enable civilisation to survive."

There's one point about Dredd himself that Lippincott's very keen to make clear, though.

"People sometimes call Judge Dredd a fascist, but he's not. He has no political agenda at all, which is an important point. Sure, the Judges are a totalitarian government, but all the people are treated equally, no matter what their race, financial position and so on. We have a speech in the film where Rico, who's like the dark side of Dredd, says 'Everyone is a criminal waiting to happen,' which is a more extreme version of Dredd's beliefs. Rico's excuse for killing civilians is, 'Hey, they would have become lawbreakers sooner or later anyway, so I'm just saving you from having to deal with them later on...'"

FOR A BIG AMERICAN FILM, MADE WITH AMERICAN money, and sporting a huge American star, it's quite surprising just how many Brits were involved in the creative process, including the

It Pays To Be Mental

...AT LEAST, IT DOES WHEN YOUR JOB'S BLOWING THINGS UP ON A FILM SET. **MJ SIMPSON** TRACKED DOWN ALEX GUNN, ONE OF THE MANY SPECIAL EFFECTS TECHNICIANS WHO WORKED ON JUDGE DREDD, TO TALK TO HIM ABOUT LIFE (AND DEATH) ON THE FILM-MAKING FRONT LINE...

Honda Fireblade? Pah! Dredd's Lawmaster bike – as modelled by the lovely Alex Gunn – lacks the massive balloon tyres of the comic book original, but certainly looks the part.

It's not all power-struggles, money-raising and script re-writes when you're making a major movie like *Judge Dredd*, you know. Oh no, there's life on the front-line too, where make-up people, gaffers, best-boys and all the rest actually get on with the business of making the film. We wanted to know just what it was like working day-to-day on a project like *Dredd*, so we tracked down Alex Gunn, one of the film's sfx technicians, to find out.

Working in effects is a boyhood dream come true for Alex, who has worked on small-scale British pictures like *Dream Demon*, *Paper House* and *Just Ask For Diamond*. He was initially hired for just a couple of weeks work on *Dredd* – and ended up staying on for six months. Although his speciality is pyrotechnics, there's a lot more to working on a giant movie set like this than simply organising the odd massive explosion...

Are you *sure*? Real people stood in front of this, "so you know they're not dummies"!

"We had to rig up mundane effects too," he explains, tongue firmly in cheek, "like the set of Mega City One, which is one of the largest ever constructed! It required something like 5,000 feet of pipe, which had to be laid in and connected up to a steam generator to give you all the steam boiling up through the manhole covers for that 'futuristic New York' look. We took over the whole of one car park, and extended out of studio grounds into open country at the rear."

Most fx technicians will tell you that blowing things up is easy. The skill lies in controlling the explosion so that it looks impressive but doesn't hurt anyone...

"There's one scene where a bomb explodes inside the Mega City One Bank," Alex explains, to illustrate the point. "There were six guards standing in front of it, and the building had to be completely destroyed. The director insisted on having real people in front of the bank, moving about, so you know

"Yes, that looks like it might work." Another, rather icky shot from the Gunn photo album.

they're not dummies, so we had to rig it up so that the bank looks like it disappears in a ball of flame – and is left a gutted shell when the smoke and flames have rolled away – without harming a hair on anybody's head.

"It took us two days to plumb all the various pyrotechnic substances that we use into the building. There are ways of angling devices so stuff explodes outwards and upwards, and passes over the heads of anybody standing in front of the building. By the time the editors have stuck a big loud bang noise over the top, and cut it together, it fulfils the fantasy."

Quite possibly the most spectacular sequence in *Judge Dredd,* however, is the "Block War" (read "full-scale riot") which opens the film.

"That action sequence was, in the main, directed by one of the producers, Beau Marks," says Alex. "We rigged up about 200 bullet hits, and countless scores of thunderflashes behind the windows, plus mortars with fireballs, and various other explosions. The idea was that we would film one small sequence, then another small sequence, and so on, and the editors would put it all together and make it look like a lot was happening.

"Something like that would normally take at least a week to rig, and at least two or three nights to film, but Beau wanted to do it different. He wanted to give the impression of a real block war. Basically, the camera was on a crane, and moving around the exterior surface of the building to give the impression it was about 40 storeys up. We had at least a dozen stuntmen running backwards and forwards, blasting out the windows with machine guns, pump-action shotguns... Myself and Mick Dirkin, one of the other technicians in the crew, were on hand with striker boards upstairs, letting rip left, right and centre, and the rest of the boys were downstairs pressing buttons and basically making the building rock and roll."

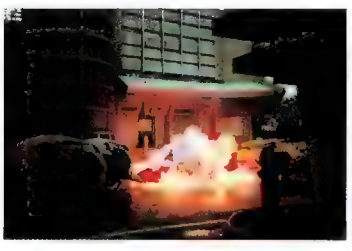
Sounds bloody brilliant to us!

"We rigged up about 200 bullet hits, and countless scores of thunderflashes behind the windows, plus mortars with fireballs and other explosive devices..."

Alex Gunn, sfx technician, on preparing for the "Block War"

The script reckons Dredd blows up this red yuppie sports car (with the owner still in it...

...naturally!), because it's parked in a "No Parking" zone. We think, however, that...

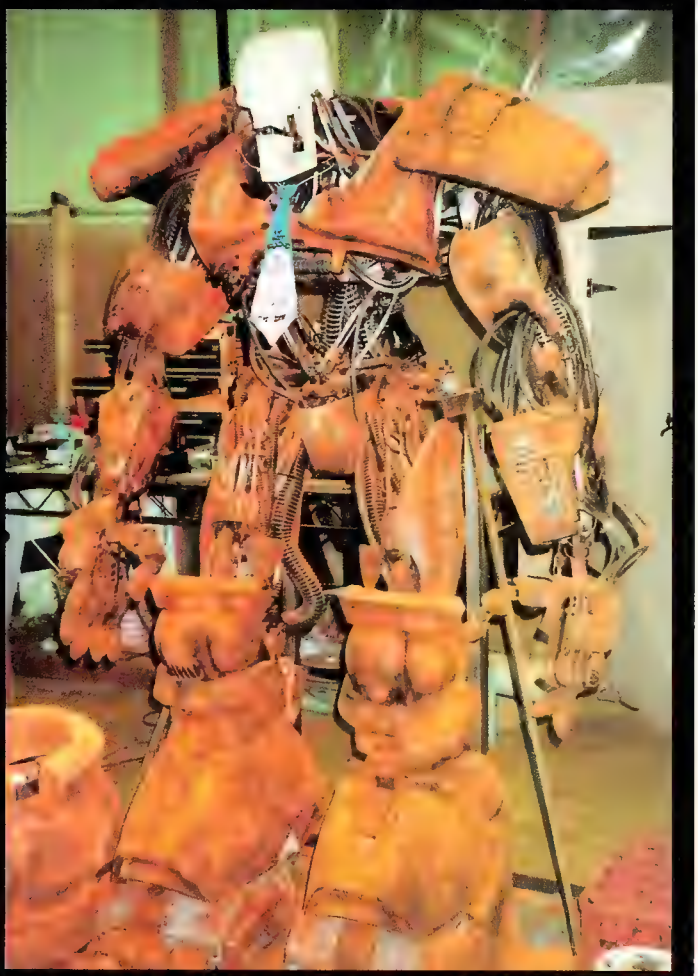


...he's really doing it to do us all an aesthetic favour. After all, this is clearly a fibreglass...

...Lamborghini replica with wings stuck on, and, as such, *much* too tacky for the film...

Robot Wars

ONE OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVE PROPS IN JUDGE DREDD IS THE ABC WAR ROBOT, LOOSELY BASED ON THE 2000AD CHARACTER HAMMERSTEIN. SFX TECHNICIAN ALEX GUNN EXPLAINED HOW IT WORKED TO **MJ SIMPSON**...



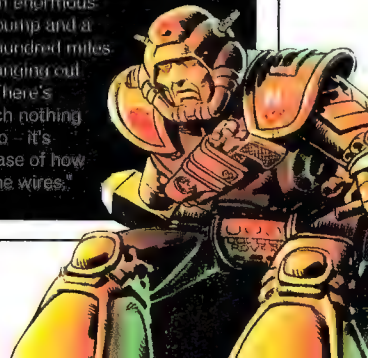
The incredible, full-size ABC war robot nears completion. Based on the Hammerstein character from the "ABC Warriors" strip (below), you'd believe it's real – and it is!

In its brief appearance in the teaser trailer for *Judge Dredd*, the ABC robot almost looks like it could be a stop-motion puppet. Not so, as everyone involved with creating the eight-foot tall war droid prop is keen to point out...

The Warrior, which serves as Judge-gone-bad Rico's personal bodyguard, was originally going to be just another man-in-a-suit, but eventually the producers were persuaded to build the thing for real, operating it using a combination of hydraulics, electronic motors and radio-controlled servos.

The final result is incredibly impressive – holes were deliberately left in the bodywork to make it quite clear that there's nobody hidden inside – and it moves very convincingly indeed. About the only thing it can't do is walk – nobody's yet invented a way to give a real-life robot a proper sense of balance, apparently, and rolling it around on wheels would definitely be cheating. Not that it matters – there are few scenes in the film where you see it full-length anyway.

"The best way to make something look convincing is to make it for real," says Alex Gunn, who worked with the monster. "The only difference between this ABC robot and a 'real' one is that ours has an enormous hydraulic pump and a couple of hundred miles of cable hanging out the back. There's pretty much nothing we can't do – it's simply a case of how you hide the wires."



"Budda, budda, budda!," as *2000AD* would say. Dredd kicks clone ass in the Genesis lab towards the end of the film. "I thought that was lovely," says Bill Wisher, confusingly.

director – a young English guy called Danny Cannon, and a shock choice to many.

"Danny made a film called *The Young Americans,*" says Charley, "which Andy Vanya at Cinergi liked – so much so that he called Danny in to talk to him about doing another of his projects, *Die Hard 3*. Danny wasn't really interested in that, but he knew Andy had *Dredd*, and really pitched for the chance to do that instead. So Andy got Sly, Ed Pressman and myself in and showed us *The Young Americans*, and though I thought the film showed some talent, the general feeling was not overwhelming. So we went looking for someone else. We talked to a lot of young directors – the guy who did *Demolition Man*, the director of *Alien*³, and so on – and a few more established people like Tony Scott and Joe Dante. The problem for Tony was that he wanted more of the black humour from the comic book, but we'd taken most of it out to distance the film from the likes of *RoboCop* and *Demolition Man*.

"Anyway, time went by and we still weren't really getting anywhere, so Andy suggested going back to Danny Cannon. Finally, in August of '93, we did. And it's worked out. Danny had a hard time – this was a real producer-driven project – but I like the work he's done."

The decision to film in England was, if anything, an even better one – not only has it got the studio space, it's also packed with some of the world's best and most experienced technicians and special effects people. Interestingly, most of these folk have been brought up with Judge Dredd too, meaning that even if most of Hollywood don't know Dredd from Adam, the guys working on the film – from director down to third coffee maker on the left – certainly did. It's something hardcore *Dredd* fans keep close to their hearts.

Shooting eventually began at Shepperton

Studios in Surrey last year, although Charley himself wasn't heavily involved in the filming. He spent most of his time in Los Angeles marketing the film. Yes, it's his fault that you're about to be swamped by *Dredd* spin-offs this Summer. And it'll be his fault when *Judge Dredd 2* – which all concerned now seem convinced will involve Dredd's arch-enemy, Judge Death – starts raking in the money in a year or two's time.

Or at least, that's the theory. Of course, it all depends on what sort of business the first film does – not in Britain particularly, where *Dredd* is big news anyway, and not in most foreign territories, where any Stallone film is guaranteed to do well, but in the States, where *Dredd* is relatively unknown and Stallone's star is maybe not quite what it was.

And there's another, much less financially important battle to be won too, of course – the battle to convince fans of the original *Dredd* comics that Hollywood hasn't ruined their character. So, Charley, how d'you think that one's going to turn out?

"Well, the look of the movie *Dredd* – the gun and the bike and so on – has now been adopted by the new *Judge Dredd* comic book," he smiles. "And in a note, John Wagner said: 'Gee, how come they haven't adopted your version of the Justice department too, because it's way better than ours?' So we'll see." He pauses. "I *hope* they like it."

Judge Dredd goes on national release on 21 July. We'll have a review, plus a look at the production design of the movie, next issue.

Error of Judgement?

Like it or not, the "classic" hero of the comics will be changed irrevocably by the Dredd depicted in the movie. But is that a good thing? Seasoned Dredd writer Alan Grant's not so sure, as **Matt Bielby** found out...

Classic comic book Dredd – big gun, big stick, and you can see even less of his face than usual! – by Wagner, Grant and Simon Bisley. But should this be how he's seen in the film?

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Alan Grant is a one-man comics industry. He's currently one of DC's main *Batman* writers, but is also well-known for *Lobo*, *The Demon* and assorted one-offs and mini-series at DC, as well as his work developing the character of Judge Anderson, Dredd's psychic sometime-companion, for Fleetway in the UK. But what he's really famous for – in this country, at least – is *Dredd*. From 1980 to 1993 he co-wrote, with *Dredd* co-creator John Wagner, many of the all-time great *Dredd* stories, including "The Apocalypse War," "The Midnight Surfer," "Oz" and "Necropolis." Now, however, *Dredd* – aside from the odd appearance in Anderson, and the occasional *Dredd/Batman* crossover with Wagner – is all in the past. Grant still cares about the character, though, and has his own distinct take on the changes made by the movie...

> "I don't mind much having been left out of the picture... I'm a comics guy. I sit alone in a room for long periods... I adapt badly to team situations."
>
> Alan Grant, frequent co-writer of *Judge Dredd*

What's been your (and John Wagner's) involvement in the film?

"My level of involvement? Next to zero. As co-creator of *Judge Dredd,* John was more involved. I believe he got a tour around the film set, and a personal call from Sylvester Stallone, which led to us writing some dialogue to accompany the movie teaser. I'm told he sounds just like he does in the movies.

"At one time, when someone was beginning to despair of getting a workable script, John and I received a phonecall from Hollywood. If I remember correctly, we were asked to work on ideas for the movie script. Neon lights flashing 'Yer big break, guys' swam dizzily across our vision. We worked day and night – well, afternoon and evening – on finding the secret that would enable Dredd to make the leap from one-dimensional comic character to three-dimensional big screen icon. Around six weeks later we were sure we had cracked it. It was only when money was mentioned that things started to go awry. Those same neon lights flashed by, only this time the message read 'Frag off, ya dweebs.'

"I can't speak for John, but I don't mind much having been left out of the picture. I write *Batman* comics, but nobody demanded my involvement in any of the *Bat*-movies. I write *Lobo* comics, but nobody asked me to try out for the *Lobo* screenplay. Different disciplines. I'm a comics guy. I sit alone in a room for long periods, balanced with hours on the phone. I adapt badly to team situations."

Who else do you think would have made a good Judge Dredd?

"Gameshow host Bruce Forsyth and football pundit Jimmy Hill both have the chin for the part. Arnie Schwarzenegger has the throwaway black humour. But Clint Eastwood was the guy John and envisaged playing the part, 15 years ago. Ideally, they'd have chosen a complete unknown and stuck the helmet to his head with superglue, creating a level of hype that could have been sustained until the sequel was ready.

"I think Stallone will make a great Judge Dredd though. He doesn't really tie in with my idea of what Dredd's all about, but the change in medium demands a change in definition. I'm sure that if anyone can make the quantum leap I mentioned earlier, it's him."

Dredd in the comics is a pretty one-note character. Why have you and Wagner taken this route, as opposed to trying to flesh him out, give him motivations and so on? Was it simply to do with having to work within the confines of a six-page story in *2000AD* every week?

"Last question first – no. In the same six-page format we managed to get inside the heads of both Psi-Judge Anderson and mutant bounty hunter Johnny Alpha. The truth is, Dredd is a one-note character because he's built on a false premise. His rationale is The Law, right or wrong, which seems to boil down to a fairly unhealthy fascism.

"Dredd, like all the Judges, is conditioned. His level of free will is determining whether to maim or go for a headshot. A story about such a character would be unrelenting if it wasn't leavened with humour. Plus, John and I hate working on serious stuff together.

"Although all icons are subject to change with time, I feel that any attempt to flesh out Dredd is bound to end in aesthetic failure (although it might end in commercial success). Dredd, like Lobo, depends on being a one-note character. He ceases to be himself as soon as you give him even one other dimension."

The success of Dredd the character seems to owe a lot to the strip's consistency, with the same few writers shaping Dredd and his world for most of its life. Do you think that now, with the movie version, the "Young Dredd" comic, the DC version and so on that this consistency is in danger of weakening – which could spoil the character? Or is Dredd such an icon he can take pretty much anything?

"No, Dredd isn't that much of an icon. I may be in a field of one here, but I believe the character is already fatally weakened, and on the verge of being spoiled. Several elements combine to make working on *Dredd* a pleasure for me – the black humour, the unnecessarily harsh laws and violence, which made for great stories, and the constant cultural springboards, where we based stories on newspaper headlines, characters on allegedly real people, and were able to illustrate the absurdity of our own culture by extrapolating it into the future.

"The 'Young Dredd' comic will remove the violence – the Judge will use a stun gun, I'm reliably informed. The emphasis will fall on strong stories, which is admirable. But a stun gun? And because *RoboCop* got there first, the movie has already removed all of the black humour...

"Don't get me wrong – I think the movie will be a raging success, although with a much younger age group. I suspect *Dredd* will be the new *Teenage Mutant Turtles,* rather than the new *Aliens* or *Terminator.*

"I saw Sly Stallone on Barry Norman's show the other night. He was obviously impressed by Dredd and his world, and I'm told he researched the character fanatically. However, he looked distinctively uncomfortable trying to explain that his version of Dredd was a hero for the future.

"This is what bugs me the most – a character John and I have always portrayed as being a fascist bastard is being smoothed out in the name of commerce, becoming a role model for a generation of kids who'll come to think fascist means cool. If I was a devotee of conspiracy theory, I'd think there was more than money at work here."

Director Danny Cannon is said to be a big *Dredd* fan. Do you think that matters much to the movie?

"No."

Although there seem to be elements of "The Day the Law Died" and other *Dredd* comic stories in the movie, is there a danger that the cop-gone-rogue Rico storyline in the film is a bit too ordinary? Do you think this makes a good starting point for a big screen version of *Dredd?*

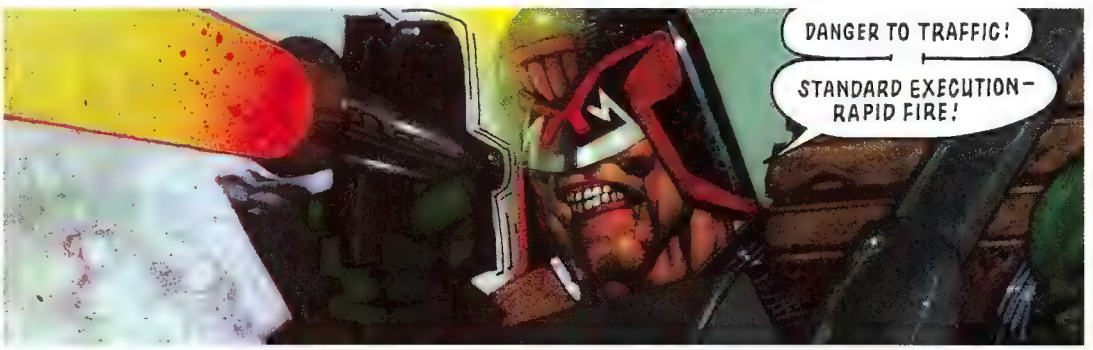
"No, I don't think it's too ordinary. The Rico storyline was written by Pat Mills, and although a fine story in its own right, had little to do with my and John's vision of *Dredd.* However, movie writing is an entirely different discipline from comics writing. What can work in a comic would make a crap movie."

One of the great strengths of *Dredd* has always been the humour, the irony, and the sly comments on present-day America – stuff that seems very British. Do Americans really understand this?

"Despite there being a small cult *Dredd* audience in the US, Americans don't really understand it. Why should they when they've got *The Simpsons?* If you expect anything more than a very good futuristic action movie you should probably avoid going to the cinema."

Finally, do you feel protective towards *Dredd?* Or is it just easy-come, easy-go?

"Yeah, easy-come, easy-go. I used to feel very protective, but not any longer. The *Dredd* John and I used to write was a glorious part of our past. I'm happy to leave it there."

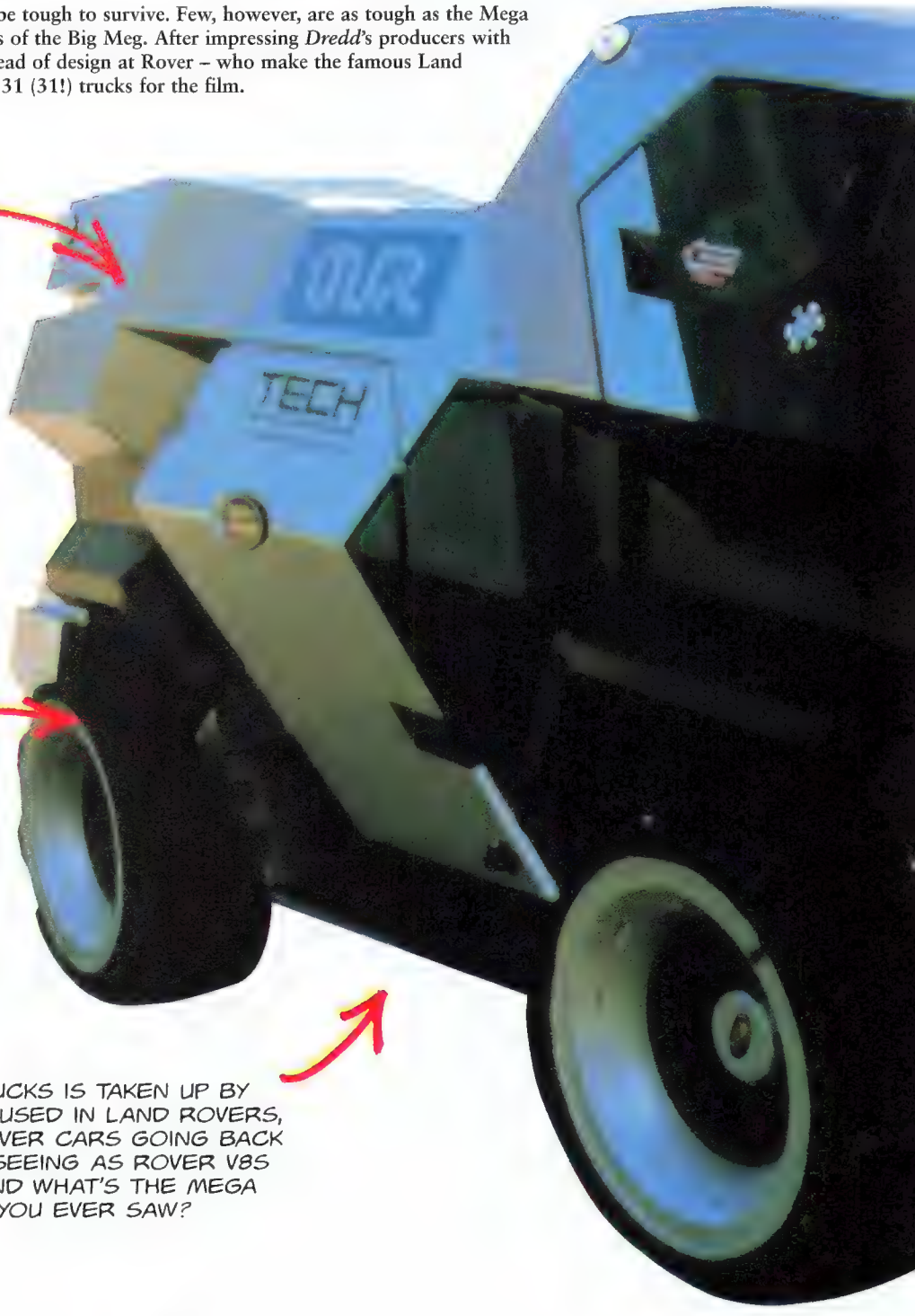


In actual fact, the comic book Dredd's rarely this brutal – he was, occasionally, in the early days, and in things like this extra-hard strip, originally run in *Rock Power* magazine – but generally he's a (slightly) less cartoony character. Can the same be said for the movie Dredd?

Mega City Cab

WOULD YOU BELIEVE THAT UNDERNEATH THIS IMPOSING EXTERIOR THERE LURKS – A LAND ROVER?

It's a tough town, Mega City One, and a car needs to be tough to survive. Few, however, are as tough as the Mega City cab, one of the most common sights on the streets of the Big Meg. After impressing *Dredd*'s producers with their concept drawings, a team led by Gordon Sked, head of design at Rover – who make the famous Land Rover off-road vehicles – ended up building a massive 31 (31!) trucks for the film.



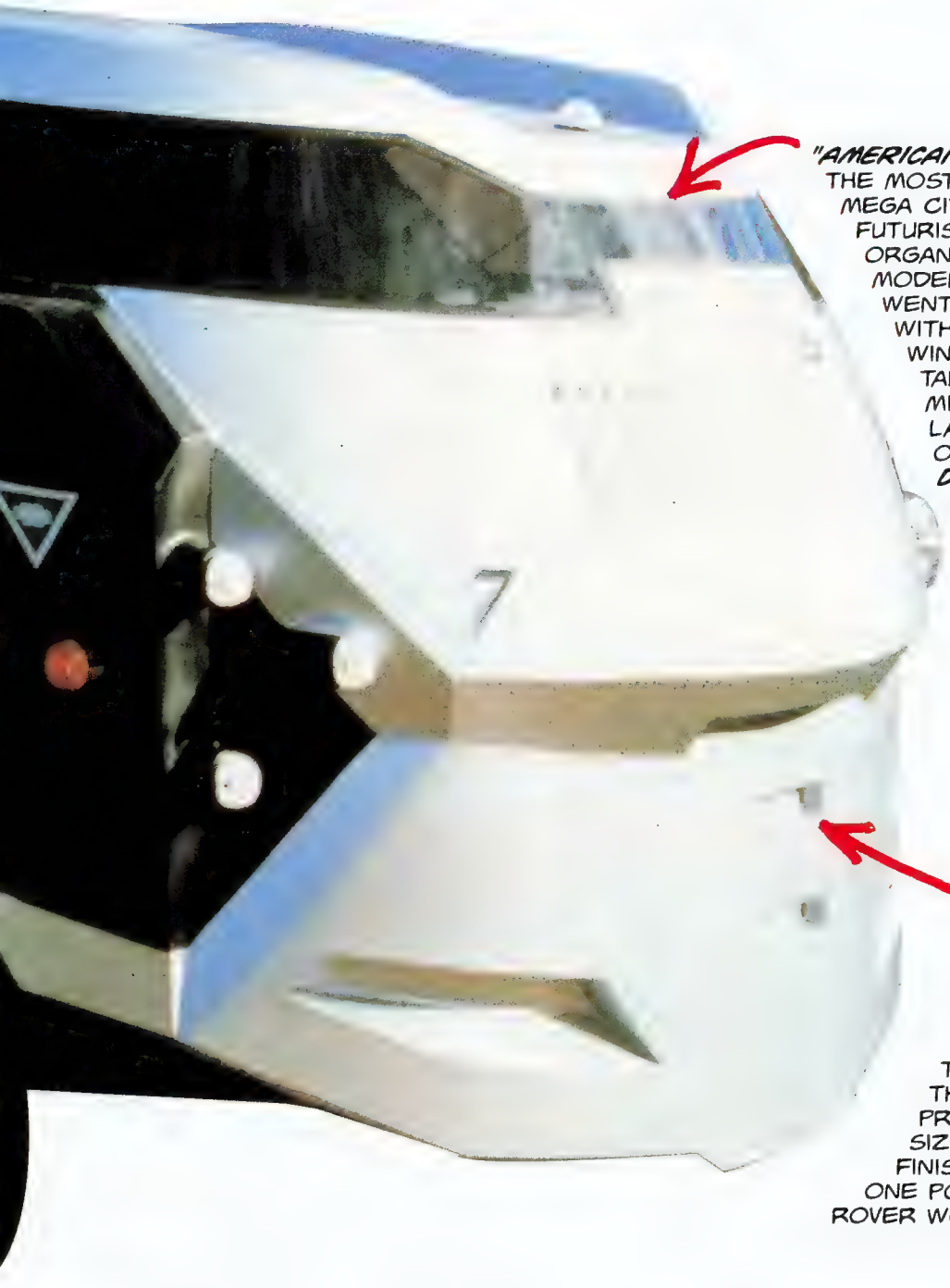
SHITTY INTERIOR
MOST OF THE MEGA CITY CABS BUILT FOR THE PROJECT HAD COMPLETELY UNFINISHED, SPIT-AND-SAWDUST INSIDES. MOST, BUT NOT ALL. ONE, HEAVILY USED IN THE FILM, WAS ACTUALLY A FULLY FUNCTIONING VEHICLE OF THE FUTURE, COMPLETE WITH FINISHED INTERIOR.
DAVID WOODHOUSE: "THESE CARS HAD TO BE PRETTY BIG, REMEMBER. THE SCRIPT CALLED FOR THEM TO BE CAPABLE OF CARRYING SIX PASSENGERS WITHIN A HIGHLY PROTECTED CELL."

STUPIDLY MASSIVE WHEELS
AS FAR AS WE CAN WORK OUT, THIS RATHER MASSIVE ROLLING STOCK (AND THE LACK OF A FRONT NUMBER PLATE, EASILY FIXED) IS ABOUT ALL THAT STOPS THE CAB BEING ROAD LEGAL. FIX WHEELS THAT PROPERLY FITTED UNDER THE WHEEL ARCHES, THOUGH, AND THERE'S NO REASON YOU COULDN'T GO CRUISING DOWN TO TESCO IN ONE OF THESE. ER, WE THINK...

FAMILIAR OLD MOTOR
MUCH OF THE INTERIOR OF THESE TRUCKS IS TAKEN UP BY MID-MOUNTED ROVER V8 ENGINES, AS USED IN LAND ROVERS, RANGE ROVERS, AND CLASSIC OLD ROVER CARS GOING BACK TO THE '60S. KIND OF FITTING, REALLY, SEEING AS ROVER V8S ARE THE HOT RODDER'S FAVOURITE, AND WHAT'S THE MEGA CITY CAB BUT THE NIFTIEST HOT ROD YOU EVER SAW?

Here's the Mega City cab in its natural environment – the mean streets of the Big Meg. The bulk of the design was done by Land Rover's most radical stylist, David Woodhouse, and while many of them were finished as cabs, others serve as delivery trucks and so on.

You'd think they'd have washed it before they took the photo, wouldn't you? Here's 26 year old David Woodhouse himself (inset), posing with his handiwork. Look out for the vehicles at promotional events in the UK and US, and note the actual Land Rover badge on the front!



"AMERICAN FOOTBALL HELMET" CAB

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT THE MEGA CITY TAXI WAS THAT IT SHOULD LOOK FUTURISTIC, AND ULTRA-HARD. ROUNDED, ORGANIC BODY-PANELS ARE COMMON IN MODERN CARS, SO THE LAND ROVER TEAM WENT FOR A SHARP-EDGED LOOK INSTEAD, WITH LARGE WHEELS AND TINY, SLIT-LIKE WINDOWS. HINTS THAT STYLING CUES TAKEN FROM THIS CONCEPT DESIGN MIGHT ACTUALLY TURN UP ON REAL-LIFE LAND ROVERS HAVE YET TO BE RULED OUT, APPARENTLY!

DAVID WOODHOUSE: "I'D DONE QUITE A LOT OF THEORETICAL WORK ON FUTURISTIC LAND ROVERS, AND ADAPTED THESE IDEAS INTO SOMETHING THAT COULD BE BASED ON AN EXISTING CHASSIS."

LAND ROVER CHASSIS

UNDERNEATH THE ARMOURED BODYWORK LURKS A LAND ROVER 101 FORWARD CONTROL, AN EXTRA-LARGE, TRUCK-LIKE LAND ROVER USED MAINLY BY THE MILITARY.

DAVID WOODHOUSE: "WE HAD LESS THAN THREE MONTHS TO COMPLETE THE DESIGN PROCESS, INCLUDING PRODUCING THREE-QUARTER AND FULL-SIZED MODELS, BEFORE DELIVERING THE FINISHED VEHICLES TO SHEPPERTON. AT ONE POINT, UP TO 20 PEOPLE FROM LAND ROVER WORKED ON THE PROJECT."

Neutral Zone

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SFX, FUTURE PUBLISHING, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BATH, AVON BA1 2BW, OR VIA E-MAIL AT sfx@futurenet.co.uk. THE BEST LETTER EACH MONTH WILL WIN AN EXCLUSIVE SFX T-SHIRT.

"NOT SCIENCE FICTION *OEUVRE* ANORAKS"

Dear SFX,
At last, a magazine about the sort of stuff I like that doesn't look like it's been put together by a bunch of incompetents. A magazine that's glossy, hip and literate in the area concerned; offers a good broad range of articles, and doesn't take itself *too* seriously.

And that latter point, I think, is very important. Too often fans of the science fiction *oeuvre* come across as anoraks of the highest order. Often, it seems, there is no room for critique of the genre, or for people to have mixed allegiances, or like other things. And this, I feel, is what keeps the genre so ghettoised in the eyes of the masses – Trekkers and Whovians will always be treated as cretins because they take it all too seriously!

The genre is one of the imagination. It's not real, and therefore shouldn't be the be-all and end-all of one's cultural experience – but it can clearly inform us about real life. People who get so wrapped up in the whole thing to the extent that it's their existence need to lighten up and, frankly, get a life!

Good luck with your venture!

Nathan Duck
Edgbaston

"CHEAP CARDBOARD"

Dear SFX,
I liked the mixed of retro and new, especially the hip, cool '70s stuff like *The Six Million Dollar Man* (Oscar Goldman really was unappreciated). The wide variety of subjects covered is good too, and means I can just dip into it whenever I want. Please keep this variety and don't just become a films/TV/comics mag. This is especially important for media that doesn't normally get much coverage, such as the radio. The Iain Banks interview was worthwhile too. I've not yet read any of his SF, and had always considered him a mainstream author who did SF. It was a pleasant surprise to find that the opposite was true.

I disagree with your reviewers' views on the Vertigo Tarot, though. The cards, book and box have a beautiful design, up to Dave McKean's usual standard, but I feel ripped off because of the quality of the manufacturing. The cards are smaller and thinner than standard Tarots and feel much cheaper. The box itself appears to be designed to last as short a time as possible! I bought these on preorder, and feel that I have been misled by DC as to their quality.

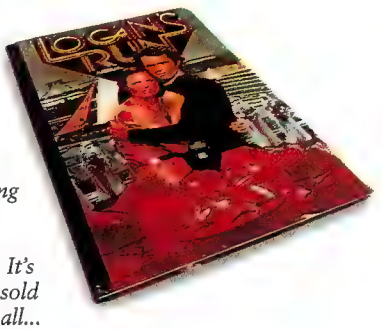
Anyway, all the best with your venture.

Scott Hughes
scott@furry.demon.co.uk

"REALLY MAD"

Dear SFX,
Did I grow up in a time zone? You mentioned *The Six Million Dollar Man* (although not *The Bionic Woman)* and many other classics, but not *Logan's Run.* I have to admit when I ask people, no-one remembers it, so did I imagine the whole thing? I scoured the mag, but found it nowhere inside. Despite this, a great mag in all.

Russell Gray
London



Nothing about Logan's Run? *How could we have been so careless? And we had nothing on the "wonderful"* Kinvig *either! It's a wonder we sold any copies at all...*

"REALLY CONFUSED"

Dear SFX,
I have just recently watched Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and was wondering if you could explain it to me. You may think this is a really stupid question, but the end of the film where Dave found himself in that room where he kept aging really confused me.

Any other information would be helpful.

Kirsty Rhodes
Leeds

The first thing you need to do is read the novel. 2001 *is unusual in that the book and the film were created pretty much simultaneously, and so to fully appreciate the story you really need both. You might also like to check out Arthur C Clarke's* The Lost Worlds of 2001. *We also recommend that you see the movie on the big screen in Super-Panavision, because it loses a lot on TV. (Or are you just taking the piss?)*

"PUT ON HOLD"

Dear SFX,
I was reading through Production Hell in issue one, and a couple of projects I happen to be interested in weren't mentioned. *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons is an incredible graphic novel that was meant to be turned into a movie by Terry Gilliam, but after the disaster of *Baron Munchausen,* it was put on hold. But then I heard it was back on, after *The Fisher King* was a huge hit. Then the rumours stopped.

"FAIRLY CAGEY"

T-SHIRT WINNER!

Dear SFX,
A science fiction mag from Future was always going to be a pretty cool move, and now it's here may I be among the first to get my oar in and say what I think. Well, pretty bloody good really – a nice mix of film, TV, comics etc., and a great not-taking-itself-too-seriously style.

However, I think you ought to be careful with regards to your coverage of films, the obvious example being *Judge Dredd.* Now, as a long time Dredd fan, I can't wait to see it on the big screen, but I would like the film to hold at least a few surprises for me.

One of the biggest problems of the Hollywood machine is that it carpet-bombs the whole of the planet with as much about its latest baby as is (in)humanly possible, the practical upshot being that everyone knows about the film – and many people know too much, having seen countless clips and screenshots – months before release, leaving them with little need to see the finished product...

While *2000AD* and the *Judge Dredd Megazine,* a few stills aside, have both been fairly cagey about the actual content of the flick, SFX launches straight into detail about flying Lawmaster bikes and chases across the sky, and promises a huge "making of..." article in issue two. It this keeps up, by the time 21 July arrives I'll know everything that happens, which'll make the whole experience of going to see the bloody thing rather pointless.

Yes, I'll be wanting to read about it, and see how the scenes were made, but I would prefer to see (and enjoy) the finished thing first. Remember, you're talking to dedicated SF fans, you don't have to sell it to us like some kind of Hollywood marionette.

Feature the film, please – we want you to – but give us a chance to see it first!

Jonathan Evans
Johnstown, Carmarthen, Dyfed

Don't read this issue, Jonathan! Don't read this... Ah. Too late. Hope the SFX T-shirt in some way compensates. Seriously, though, we reckon this is exactly what our readers want!

What happened? I also heard that the incredible novel *Enders Game* by Orson Scot is going to be made into a movie. Is it?

Mark Matheson
100067.1304@compuserve.com

Gilliam dropped off the Watchmen *project yonks ago, but has been hard at work recently on* Twelve Monkeys, *a time-travel yarn starring Bruce Willis and Brad Pitt.* Enders Game *is just one of a myriad of great SF tomes which have been "optioned," but, quite frankly, you could well see* Star Wars Part 9 *before most of them.*

Production Hell is not – and never can be – completely definitive. It's just a guide to current and rumoured genre productions.

"DAMN GOOD"

Dear SFX,
I'm reading through the first issue of SFX at the moment, and I'm quite impressed. I don't generally like SF magazines, but then again I wouldn't say I was a big SF fan anyway. SFX seems to have about the right mix of the stuff that I do like, so no complaints there!

The main reason I'm writing is your idea for a *Hellblazer* TV series – it's a damn good one, but unfortunately it's been tried before. You remember those two crap *Swamp Thing* films? Well, the company that made them bought all the film rights for *Swamp Thing*, and so unfortunately also own the John Constantine character, which is a double-shame, because *Swamp Thing* is also good again at last. I think you'll find that it's actually a good seller too.

Tim Dodge
timmy@orqwith.demon.co.uk

Hellblazer *is a good seller for a Vertigo comic, but it's got a long way to go before it's up there with* Sandman, *or any of the big Marvel or DC superhero titles.*

"HURRAH!"

Dear SFX,
Is there an e-mail address for letters to SFX? If not, why not?

Trevor May
trevor.may@zetnet.co.uk

The above was sent to us, somewhat bizarrely, by e-mail – a situation which our deputy ed describes as "Brechtian."

"ONE LONG ADOLESCENT WANK FANTASY"

Dear SFX,
So Iain [M.] Banks "likes strong female characters," does he? Writer of fiction he may be, but who's he trying to kid? His leading women are almost always boy toys. *Canal Dreams* is one long adolescent wank fantasy, and *Against a Dark Background* involves one woman who's a whore but also happens to be a crack shot, and one woman who's a crack shot but also happens to be a whore. The overall impression is of a writer who, when it comes to women, wants to use them, abuse them, then have them fight back because seeing them struggle adds to the thrill.

This impression is not countered by the images on the covers of *State of the Art* and – especially – *Against a Dark Background*, before it was re-jacketed, when it still looked like a Culture novel. I know better than to judge a book by its (etc), and I know too that he most likely does not choose, and certainly does not create, these pictures, but the artist clearly thinks them representative of some aspect[s] of Banks' work. Is it anoraks Banks fans wear, or dirty macs?

Yours faithfully,

Liona [M.] D'Vidd

At least Banksie doesn't stoop to the level of cheap self-promotion by writing pseudonymous complaints to SF magazines...

From next issue, SFX will be running a fanzines page. If you produce a fanzine of any sort – fiction, news, media, literary, comics, anything at all – send a copy to the SFX office, along with details of frequency, cost, etc. and we'll put you in the mag. Can't say fairer than that, can we? We also want contributions for "Doing it my way," where you – the readers – recreate a famous scene from a classic film, TV show, book or comic using whatever comes to hand. You also win T-shirts for this, and since we've not had any contributions yet your chances of winning are rather higher than normal. Write to the usual address...

SFXCELLENT! Best Bit of Science Fiction Ever

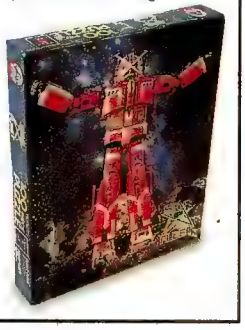
SFXcellent is your chance to enthuse about your favourite bits of SF – that quintessential book, film, comic, or whatever that you consider the Best Bit Of Science Fiction Ever. This month's nomination comes from George Stevens of Leicester.

"Back in the good old days, at the turn of the '80s, anarchy reined in *Tiswas*. Everyone remembers Chris, Sally and the Phantom Flan Flinger with a warm feel-good factor. But do you remember what followed *Tiswas*, presumably in an attempt to calm the kids down? It was the forgotten classic – *Star Fleet*.

"So what was *Star Fleet*, and why is it a classic? Well, it was a cross between *Star Wars*, anime and Gerry Anderson, but with a magic ingredient. It had a plot. None of this 'boldly going' rubbish. They were on a mission from, well, as it turned out, the spirit of the next millennium. Er, I think. Unfortunately, I was only ten back then, so I don't remember all the intricacies. What I do remember is the cute furry monster, and the spaceships that joined up to make a giant robot. And the music was by Brian May. Sadly, that's all the hard facts I can piece together, although the overall memory of *Star Fleet* – the feel, the atmosphere and the mood – linger on. To my knowledge, it's never been repeated, it's not on video (unless on Betamax), and there's none of the nostalgia for it that even Gerry Anderson's lesser efforts create. And that's a crying shame."

SFX's very own Suzi 9mm adds: *"Star Fleet* was an American adaptation of a 1980 Japanese series called *X-Bomber*, and was first broadcast in 1982-3. It may well have been repeated on some ITV stations.

"Brian May covered the theme song, but didn't perform the TV version. And a 1989 video release was a staple in bargain bins up until a few years ago. The best thing about it was undoubtedly the cool theme song, which began: 'Send a message out across the skies/Alien raiders just passed Damon Knight!!!'"



***Star Fleet:* A sort of cross between Gerry Anderson, anime and *Star Wars*. And it had a story to it too...**

SFX
The Science Fiction Magazine
#2 June 1995

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The subscription rate for 14 issues is:
UK £36, post free; Europe £63; rest of world £92

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Printed in the UK.
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Future

SFX's official beer of the month: Staropramen. Yum. SFX 2 was put together, in a bloody hurry, to the sounds of Pulp's *Common People*, McAlmont & Butler's *Yes*, Whiggy's *Think of You* (or whatever it's called) and Elton's *Made in England*.

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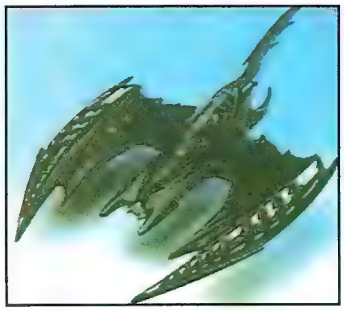

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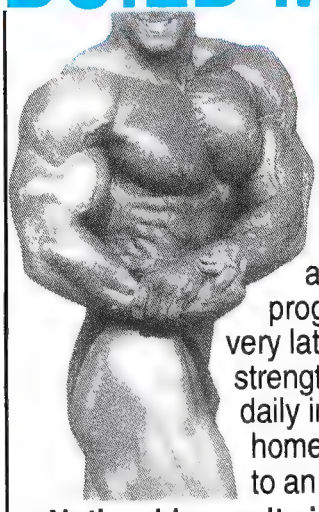

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David Langford

Awards Fever!

Once again, the science fiction world is convulsed with its annual throes of award presentations, shortlists and general log-rolling. So how can you grab an award?

Well, being American helps. Even the Arthur C Clarke award, funded by expat Briton Clarke and judged by a mainly British panel, tends to go to North Americans. In the last nine years, for example, only two Brits (Colin Greenland and Jeff Noon) have won said accolade. This year's winner was Kansas belle Pat Cadigan for her novel *Fools*.

Likewise, the 1995 shortlists for the long-established Hugo and Nebula awards were 100% American. The Nebulas are chosen by writers' organisation, the SF and Fantasy Writers of America. Foreigners aren't excluded, but few join because the attraction of SFFWA – its support of authors against dodgy publishers – doesn't extend overseas. The 1995 Nebula winner was Greg Bear for *Moving Mars*... Many, however, felt it wasn't his best book (try the stunning *Queen of Angels*), but that he deserved the award on past merit alone.

The Hugos are voted for by members of the World SF Convention; which this year is being held in Glasgow. Scotland's own Iain M Banks seemed bound to be shortlisted for *Feersum Endjinn*, but missed out by a hair – there are hordes of American voters out there, and the book hadn't appeared in British paperback when the shortlist was compiled. (Still, he can take comfort from the fact it did win the almost as prestigious British SF Association Award.)

There's no conspiracy at work here. The fact is British and American tastes differ, publishing schedules matter, and there are so many more Americans. A book published here in 1993, and wildly popular in a late 1994 US reprint, has no chance at the Hugo – few Americans would have seen it before 1994 Hugo voting, while the 1993 British appearance disqualifies it for entry in 1995. Alas.

© Rob Scott

"If you write SF which explores sexual issues in a manner that could be called 'gender-bending,' then you could always bag the James Tiptree Jr Award, named for the famous SF pseudonym of Alice Sheldon."

So how does a humble Brit get on the bandwagon? Well, there are other Hugo categories. Our own Brian Stableford's *Les Fleurs Du Mal* is shortlisted under Best Novella this year – it appeared in a US magazine, and the Novella (under 40,000 words) category is less hotly contested than that for the Novel. Or there's Semiprozine, a bastard Hugo category invented to stop commercial SF newsletters like *Locus* winning the Hugo for Best (amateur) Fanzine. The British *Interzone* regularly appears here, and regularly doesn't win. Non-Fiction is another odd category, covering ill-assorted material: Art books, graphic novels, criticism, SF autobiographies, even collections of humorous articles about SF. This year's Non-Fiction oddity is *The Book on the Edge of Forever*, an anthology that's been a quarter-century in limbo – see last issue. And Best Fanzine has room for us too: The British newsletter *Ansible*, "The *Private Eye* of SF," is listed this year – maybe because it's the only such publication to have its text distributed freely on the Internet.

Another route to award fame is to specialise. If you write SF which explores sexual issues in a manner that could be called "gender-bending," then you could always bag the James Tiptree Jr Award, named for the famous SF pseudonym of Alice Sheldon. Britain's Gwyneth Jones shared a Tiptree for her novel *White Queen;* 1995 winners were Nancy Springer's *Larque on the Wing* and Ursula Le Guin's *The Matter of Seggri*.

Alternatively, be a SF critic and win the Pilgrim Award – or the William Atheling Award (it helps if you're Australian). Publish an original paperback in the USA and you'll also be eligible for the Philip K Dick Award (given this year to Robert Charles Wilson's *Mysterium*). You could also bribe the learned judges who decide the John W Campbell Memorial Award. Or why not become a libertarian? The Prometheus Award for libertarian SF is a solid gold trophy whose value is loudly announced each year. To blend into this sort of company it's vital not to use your forename – previous luminaries included L Neil Smith and F Paul Wilson (in homage to L Ron Hubbard?).

Passing over about 50 other tantalising SF awards, it's obviously time to institute a trophy for those increasingly rare SF works which are never nominated or shortlisted for *any* of the countless glittering prizes. This consolation prize will be named in memory of the unsung SF author who appears last in every category of every Hugo voting ballot: Noah Ward.

FROM LATE JUNE
AT SELECTED OUTLETS...

THE COMIC THAT THINKS IT'S
A MONSTER

John Grant

It"s a Jnugle Uot Their!

"Just to the south of them, the new Socket was like a titanic concrete bunker, the new elevator cable rising out of it like an elevator cable..."
Kim Stanley Robinson,
Green Mars

"Her very existence made his forebrain swell until it threatened to leak out his sinuses."
Nancy A Collins,
Sunglasses After Dark

"Elayne wished the woman would just revert to herself instead of bludgeoning her with a lady's maid from the Blight."
Robert Jordan,
The Fires of Heaven

"Her English accent would have cut glass, even in the Highlands where pewter or pottery was more traditional."
Bernard King,
Time-Fighters

For the past 18 months or so, Dave Langford and I have been collecting howlers like the above for a book we may one day put together called *Thog's Masterclass*.

But while we've derived a lot of harmless fun from the slips of the great, there's always been a certain guilty undertone to our mirth. You see, there's a fair chance some of the indiscretions weren't committed by the authors at all, but by their copy-editors.

Ah, you thought a publisher took an author's pristine manuscript and just sent it straight to the typesetter, didn't you? Er, no. Not quite. Most books are extensively revised by a copy-editor before they go to print. Few authors produce perfect manuscripts that can be sent directly to the typesetter.

Ideally, the copy-editor, usually a freelancer, corrects spelling, notes inconsistencies of plotting or characterisation, amends the worst inelegances of style, and generally applies a final polish. Sometimes the author is grateful – in fact, it's common for authors to request the same copy-editor for future work.

But this isn't always the case – indeed, over the past decade or so it's become more the exception than the rule. The difficulty is this: At least half the freelance copy-editors at work today are illiterate. What's worse, the in-house editors – the folk who hire these people – are themselves possessed of only dodgy literacy, so cannot understand what an author is fussing about when s/he complains that good sentences have been turned into bad ones, incorrect words have been substituted for correct ones...

Rob Scott

"Authors *used* to approach their copy-edited manuscripts in the expectation that... in general, they'd find problems had been solved for them..."

This isn't entirely a new phenomenon. A distinguished SF author of my acquaintance often tells how, years ago, he arrived in the office of an editor who was at the time well known in the field. For some reason she had to dash out of the office, and in her absence his gaze happened to fall on the manuscript she was dealing with at the time. To his horror he saw that, on the top-most page alone, there were two or three places where the spelling had been amended – wrongly!

In the old days, of course, this sort of thing was rare. Today, it's commonplace. Authors used to approach their copy-edited manuscripts in the expectation that, in general, they'd find problems had been solved for them. Nowadays, authors tend to receive their copy-edited manuscripts with a dreadful, sinking feeling: How many illiteracies and misconceptions will their in-house editor permit them to change back?

Any author can tell you horror stories of this type. Probably the worst that happened to me was when a publisher, for three novels in a row, insisted on using a copy-editor whose vocabulary was, shall we say, limited. Every time I used a word with which she wasn't familiar, she rushed to her ***Reader's Digest*** dictionary and stuck in a cosy Mills & Boon-like replacement. One result was that, where I'd described a fantasy city as "laid out in the form of a giant sigil," she'd replaced "sigil" with the word "seal."

In that instance I was allowed to reinstate my original wording. In far too many others, though, before I finally persuaded my in-house editor to find another copy-editor, I was overruled on the grounds that correcting everything "would be too costly."

So that's why, even as I giggle at some of the items sent for inclusion in ***Thog's Masterclass***, I feel a strong twinge of sympathy for the author. Perhaps s/he has merely been yet another victim of the copy-editor's pen...

Renowned SF and fantasy author John Grant cringes momentarily once a month as the latest issue of SFX drops through his letterbox, wondering what terrible injustices have been performed on his column this time...

Gerry ANDERSON

HE'S A GENUINE SFX HERO, GERRY ANDERSON. NOT ONLY HAS HE ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY CHAMPIONED THE CAUSE OF BRITISH TV FANTASY OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS, BUT HE'S ALSO LEFT US WITH A FLOTILLA OF WONDERFULLY IMAGINATIVE SCIENCE FICTION TV SHOWS. SURE, HE'S PRODUCED SOME DROSS, BUT NOBODY'S PERFECT, AS HE HAPPILY ADMITS TO **MATT BIELBY...**

There's some debate in the SFX office about whether Gerry's a genuine talent or not. A lot of us say yes, and cite as evidence a string of TV shows that – for all their faults – threw up startling image upon startling image, and will continue to be remembered when every one of their contemporaries languishes in obscurity. Certainly, you'd be hard pressed to find a British bloke between the ages of, say, 20 and 45 who doesn't remember at least one Century 21 production with affection.

But his detractors just won't have it. They simply laugh, and point to the experience of this month's video marathon (see page 52), where – it has to be said – a beer-and-pizza night of Gerry's old shows soon became a chore as we realised, one by one, just how many of the shows never really deviated from the "great effects/dull plotlines/wooden characters" cliché. "Great intro sequences, fun for ten minutes, but I wouldn't want to watch the whole thing," soon became the consensus of opinion, and you should have heard the sigh of relief when it was time for showings of *UFO* and *Space: 1999*, and we realised we didn't have to sit through any more of those bloody puppets.

And yet, and yet... The thing is, you can't help loving Gerry Anderson shows all the same. Sure, you can point out all the flaws – God knows, there are enough of them – but at the same time I'll never forget those palm trees flopping to the ground when Thunderbird 2 takes off, or the grim warning that "Captain Scarlet is indestructible – you are not." Almost every show was touched by genius, and not all of it attributable to the work of special effects supremo Derek Meddings. Stingray leaping out of the sea, pursued by an aquaphibian Terror Fish; that was brilliant. So was Thunderbird 1 rising up from under the swimming pool, that Eagle spiralling down at the start of *Space:1999*, Parker going "Yuss, M'lady," and Destiny Angel simply being Destiny Angel. And the theme tunes: "Marina, aqua marina...", "I wish I was a spaceman, the fastest guy alive..." At the end of the day, you simply can't say Gerry's shows aren't brilliant. It's just not on.

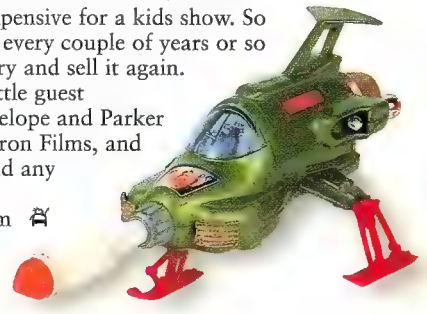
As Dave Golder and I walk in to see Gerry Anderson, familiar words ring in my ears: Anything can happen in the next half hour...

To kick off with, tell us a bit about your current project, *Space Precinct*. How did this one come about?

"Well, you have to go back ten years ago, when I was looking around for something new to make. My shows always seem to turn out very expensive, so I need to try and get the American market to pay for them. For years the networks over there have been saying "No more cop shows," but they're still taking at least one a year, so an obvious idea for me seemed to be the New York police in space.

"We made a pilot, called *Space Police*, using human actors for some scenes and puppets for others – it was very much designed for kids – and showed it to some British and American broadcasters. Everyone said it was terrific – until we told them how much it was going to cost. It was just too expensive for a kids show. So the thing ended up on the shelf, but every couple of years or so we'd take it down, dust it off, and try and sell it again.

"Then one day I was doing a little guest appearance thing with the Lady Penelope and Parker puppets for John Needham of Mentron Films, and when it was all over he asked if I had any properties that might interest him. I showed *Space Police* to him and Tom



Space Precinct **boasts some of the most spectacular model work seen in a Gerry Anderson production. The Space Suburb, shown here, is an orbiting housing complex above Demeter City.**

Gutteridge, the boss at Metron, and they loved it. Tom said 'Why not turn it into an adult show?', which would make it even more expensive, of course, but then we might be able get a decent time slot and some serious backing. And it all went from there."

How any years after the original *Space Police* pilot was this?

"About eight years. John took the original pilot, cut out all the scenes with puppets that really indicated it was a kids show, and took the result to Cannes. An American company jumped, and that was it."

So you had to start again from scratch...

"Pretty much. The first thing we did was wrap up all the puppets. In the original show, Brogan – the human captain of the orbiting police station, played by Shane Rimmer – was unable to go down to the planet because those scenes used puppets. We had four cops – three of which were cat-like characters called Tom, Dick and Harry, and the fourth was a human girl – who went on all the adventures. The cat-like characters were represented by large puppets when they were in the spacestation with Brogan, and by smaller replicas when they went to the model sets, while the girl had this trick of turning her face into silicon, so it became a kind of mask, when she went to the planet. That, of course, enabled us to use a puppet of her for those bits...

"The problem was, to make it a full-blown live action thing, all the aliens had to be full size, so the whole thing grew. We've ended up with prosthetics, live-action, motion-control, miniature effects and computer work, all combined in the same show. We've got an incredible number of special effects too – lots more than in *Space:1999*, for instance.

"An additional problem with a police series is that you have to have so many different locations, which can make it incredibly expensive. This makes *Space Precinct* more complicated than what we used to do in *UFO* or *Space: 1999*, where we had what was basically a giant Lego set, so we could move walls around to make our moonbase look much bigger than it actually was."

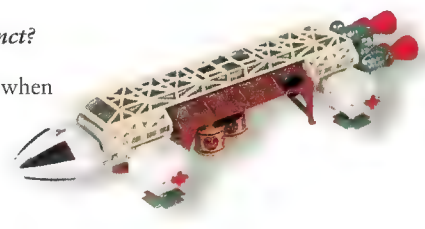
Dozens of aliens populate *Space Precinct*, which makes each episode a nightmare to film.

How do you see the future of *Space Precinct?* At one point people were saying that you'd like to be seen as a Gene Roddenberry figure, taking it to another series, a film and so on...

"Well, it's a pretty obvious comparison to make, I suppose. I'd certainly like to see the show go to a second series – it's still unclear as to whether it will or not – and then a third. And if it did there'd inevitably be a feature film. If that was successful it'd lead to more... So, yes, it'd be nice to follow along similar lines."

How happy are you with *Space Precinct?*

"It's very difficult to be totally happy when



you're making a show like this. You see, when the first episode is completed you feel really good, because it worked – all the elements came together, and you've actually made something. It's terrific.

"Then, as everybody in the film unit gets used to the show and the problems, their work gets better, the scripts get better and the actors get more into their roles, so by the time you get round to episode 20 or so, it's just fantastic. That's great, but there's always a voice in the back of your head saying, 'Oh God, I wish we could have made the earlier ones just as good...' Certainly, *Space Precinct* has improved beyond all recognition as the season has gone on."

Have you made any major changes to improve the show?

"Well, as you proceed with a series it soon becomes clear that certain directors don't deliver, so you don't use them again. I'd say the big lesson I've learned on *Space Precinct* is that we can only use A class directors. We've got people like John Glenn now, the Bond director, and that makes all the difference.

"As far as scripts are concerned, we've learned very quickly that we have to take the subject matter seriously – not to the extent that there's no fun in them, but to the extent that you believe in the basic premise of cops in space. The other thing of paramount importance is, of course, the casting – particularly for the aliens. You have to get the type of actor who can still do a good job with their faces covered in latex.

"Oh, and we've started to use a lot of model sets towards the end of the series, which has opened the show up tremendously."

So you'd kind of like to make a bunch of episodes, then throw the first five away and start with number six...?

"Yes, or maybe throw away even more! I think the ideal situation is where you get to series two, and you're able to call everybody together and say 'Okay, let's review what we've done.' You chuck some of the old ideas out, get some better ones in, and you're off."

What's the general reaction been to the show?

"Oh, outstanding. We've obviously had one or two smart arse critics, but they're the type who slate everything. The reaction of the crew, their families, the merchandising companies, and the media generally has been excellent.

"Simone Bendix [who plays Officer Castle in *Space Precinct*] is extremely good, because she's highly fanciable but she's not a bimbo. It's very difficult to get somebody to play the part of a police officer believably, and yet be sexually attractive at the same time, so we're very lucky there."

"In the UK, the ratings on Sky have gone through the roof. I know for one of the first shows they had a 1.1 million audience before we went on the air, then we came and took 3.7, and the show following us took 1.1. That was on a Saturday night, at 7pm, so basically they turned on for *Space Precinct*, then turned off when it had finished."

How much direct involvement do you have in the day-to-day running of the show?

"Up until quite recently I was working 13 to 14 hours a day on it, and at weekends. Everything I do is very much hands on, but, having said that, we have 200 people on the pay-roll, so I don't want to create the impression that I invent it all, because I don't.

"Things I'm directly involved in are approving all scripts and choosing directors – although after that I try not to interfere. It's the same with all the departments. It tends to rub off, because if you choose a top person in special effects they'll bring similar people with them, and so on. What I don't do is spend a great deal of time on the set. I get criticised for that. People say: 'Why don't you spend more time on the floor?', but the truth of the matter is I feel uncomfortable on set. I don't want to create the impression that I'm checking up on everyone."

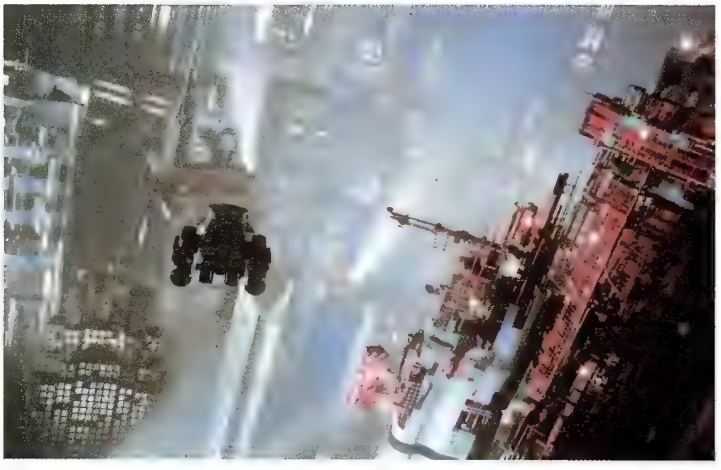
Much of the world of *Space Precinct* is represented using detailed model sets like this one.

Tell us more about the actors in the show. Are there any who've particularly taken off with the fans?

"Certainly, Ted Shackleford is a very fine lead and a very good actor – but much better known in America than he is here. He was in *Knot's Landing* for 12 years, after all. Rob Youngblood, his partner, has turned out to be a very good number two, and Simone Bendix – have you seen her? – is extremely good, because she's highly fanciable but not a bimbo. It's very difficult to get somebody to play the part of a police officer believably, and yet be sexually attractive at the same time, so we're very lucky there. Then there's Sergeant Podley, who's become one of the stars. In fact, I think all the regular alien police are going

Well, would *you* like to try arresting guys like this? The man who has to give it a go...

...is this chap, Lieutenant Patrick Brogan, alias *Knot's Landing*'s Ted Shackleford.



Demeter City, Brogan's *Blade Runner*-like beat, home of Creons, Tarns and other aliens.

An image that haunted all our childhood dreams – Thunderbird 2, palm trees flattened by its sides, prepares for take off. Just imagine, if you will, a '90s-style big screen version of *this*...

to become very well known. It's one of the big differences between this and lots of other shows – we don't just have aliens peppered into the crowd. They're playing leading roles."

Most people think of the old puppet stuff when they hear your name, but *Space Precinct* and most of the more recent shows have been live action affairs. Have you always wanted to do "the real thing?"

"I've always wanted to do live action – I just got landed with puppets. I mean, I'm quite delighted that people like the puppets, but I find it quite difficult myself to look at the screen and see anything other than a marionette controlled by wires. You think, 'This is a funny sort of character to have in a rip-roaring science fiction adventure.' I think you have to remember that the puppet shows were made 30 years ago, when marionettes must have been a bit more acceptable. I can't see how you could do a show like that today..."

Gerry checks a shot. These days he largely avoids the set, leaving directing to the directors.

The last puppet show you did – not counting *Dick Spanner* – was *Terrahawks*. How do you feel about it now?

"I think the main problem with *Terrahawks* was that it was pulled from a decent time slot after episode 13. It went on the air and we'd started building its ratings slowly, so by the time it got to episode 13 it was doing well – but then they pulled it. It's not one of my best, certainly, but I think it would have done a lot better if it'd been supported.

"British television tends to support series they've made themselves – Carlton will support a Carlton show, and so on. They tend to shove programmes made by outside companies in anywhere. My shows have often been outsiders in this respect."

Of all your programmes, which ones are you really proud of?

"*Thunderbirds* is one I like, and it seems to be the one everyone else likes too. The other one – and it may surprise you to hear this – is *Four Feather Falls*, which was a puppet Western and quite good fun.

"But *Thunderbirds* is the big one. Kids like to see jeopardy and destruction on the screen, and *Thunderbirds* gave them all that – except it was people saving lives, not destroying things, so it was a good format. There was a family situation to the show too, which was nice, and it was an hour long, which is very important, because it meant we were able to take a bunch of characters, show the audience what nice people they were for 15 minutes, then drop them in the crap and spend the rest of the programme trying to get them out of it."

A whole new generation has got into your shows after a number of them have been shown recently on BBC 2. Did that surprise you?

"Not as much as it did other people, because I've got a ten year old boy of my own now who watches cassettes of the programmes with me, and he enjoys them."

It seemed increasingly that with the shows after *Thunderbirds – Captain Scarlet,*

UFO and Space: 1999, especially – things got a lot grimmer. Certainly, *Space: 1999* was very dark...

"That was probably to do with my marriage coming to an end! It was the explosion of my marriage that blew the moon out of orbit!"

You were using live action for most of those shows. How do you feel about the old criticism that the puppets in a show like *Thunderbirds* had more personality than the live action characters in, say, *UFO*?

"Well, there are certain clichés that've been used by the press about my shows over the years and are still being used now – things like 'The characters are very wooden' and 'The puppets act better than the live actors,' and 'Gerry's pulling the strings.'

"I think something like *UFO* could have done with better scripts and better directors, both of which give you believability and a feeling of quality, but there was nothing wrong with the actors."

Since PolyGram bought all the ITC properties, there's been a lot of talk about a new *Thunderbirds* feature film. Will it be a live action affair?

"I can't imagine doing it any other way. Can you?"

Well, think of *Thunderbirds* and you immediately think of puppets...

"I know, but I can't believe people would go to the cinema these days and pay good money to see normal marionettes. But then, if it was stop-motion, using the most sophisticated special effects techniques, it'd take forever to make. And anyway, I can't help thinking that if you're going to do it like that, why bother? Why not have real people?"

Yet audiences still have this amazing affection for the marionettes...

"Well, what I was thinking of doing was this (and this isn't in the script by the way!): You open up with a shot of Penelope's mansion as it was seen on the TV show – a beautiful puppet-style model – and the camera moves right up to the door, then you go inside, and there's Penelope, as a puppet, just like you had in the original *Thunderbirds*. She rings a bell

"That was probably to do with my marriage coming to an end! It was actually the explosion of my marriage that blew the moon out of orbit in *Space: 1999!*"

Gerry Anderson on why his post-*Thunderbirds* work was so much darker...

and Parker comes in, saying "Yes, M'lady," and suddenly she morphs into, you know, an amazing bit of crumpet. Parker reacts in surprise, and you see her go over to the mirror and look at herself, a real actress now, standing there with her plunging neckline in what's obviously a real stately home, and she likes what she sees. Parker does a double-take and goes "M'lady, cor..." or something like that, and then he too morphs from a puppet into a real actor.

"What I'm basically saying is I think there'd be a way of doing it where the characters start as puppets, but don't stay that way for long."

Has there been interest in your other series? *Captain Scarlet* seems an obvious candidate...

"I think that if *Thunderbirds* came back as a major feature film and was the success that I think it would be, *Captain Scarlet* would make a wonderful second feature..."

One of the main things everyone remembers about your shows is the amazing hardware – from Supercar right up to the Eagles in *Space: 1999*. How important do you think these were to your success?

"Very important – they almost became characters in the shows. With *Thunderbirds*, my favourite was Thunderbird 2. I don't think any of the others were anything to write home about. I suppose Thunderbirds 1 and 2 were the key craft, partly because of their designs, but partly

The Star Cruiser, built not for a Century 21 show, but as the basis for an Airfix kit.

because of the way the stories worked. Scott would go whizzing off to find out what was going on in Thunderbird 1, and try to control the situation, then Thunderbird 2 would chug along bringing up the heavy gear. It's a very believable way for a rescue operation to operate, in fact. The idea of Thunderbird 2's separate pods with different types of equipment was dreamed up by Derek Meddings, and I thought it was an excellent gimmick."

Most people seem to remember, as kids, looking forward to the bits when the Thunderbirds took off – even if they'd seen the same sequence many times before. They'd want to see the palm trees flop down, the swimming pool move aside, and so on...

"Yes. I used to play those launches over and over again, and the people at ATV would to say, 'Look, you can't go through that every week, Gerry, cut it out.' But I think people loved watching them."

Did you think at the start of each new series: "Right, we've got to come up with some new gimmicks for this one..."

"Oh yes, they were very important. I was in a very powerful position at the time, because I was head of this studio, as well as being producer of the show, so I could say 'Do this' and it would just happen. But at the same time I've never been a confident person, so I'd go around asking everyone their opinion, making sure I was doing the right thing."

Which characters did you like, and what or who inspired them?

"Well, I thought Pedro and Fernando, the two Mexican bandits from *Four Feather Falls*, were very good. Scott from Thunderbirds was always popular, and so was Alan – although John I hated. And I thought Penelope and Parker were very good too, of course – Parker particularly. His voice was actually based on a waiter who used to serve us in a nice English pub we'd go to for lunch. Arthur would serve the meal, and at the end he'd come over and start chatting to us, and he'd soon get into telling us stories – 'Ho yes, when I worked for Her Majesty in Windsor Castle...' and so on. When I saw the sculpture of

A pair of SHADO mobiles, Earth's last line of defence against the alien menace in *UFO*.

A nice shot for the Tracy family album. From left: Gordon (Thunderbird 4), Virgil (Thunderbird 2), John (on a rare vacation from Thunderbird 5), Brains, and the boss-man, big "Mr" Jeff Tracy.

Parker, I said, "I know the voice for that," so we took David Graham, who played the voice, down to the pub every day for a week to chat up Arthur, and pick up all his inflections. We never told Arthur, because he was so proud of his association with the royal family. If we'd said we'd based a character on him, I think it would have broken his heart..."

Did Parker and Penelope actually have a "thing" going?

"Well, it's very interesting, because we're always doing jokes about that – not on the show, of course, but nowadays. David Graham does a brilliant skit down the pub where he says randy things about Lady Penelope in his Parker voice! It's wonderful!"

Let's talk a bit about the technical realities of your shows. How, for instance, did Cloudbase in *Captain Scarlet* stay up?

Gerry is joined at the opening of a Thunderbooks SF shop in 1988 by a few familiar friends...

"Atomic motors, with down-thrusters, the same as on a Harrier jet. All four motors had to keep adjusting themselves to balance the thrust on each corner to keep it level."

Okay, how about the moon blowing out of orbit in *Space: 1999*? Didn't you worry that people simply wouldn't believe in something like that?

"If you have a bleeding great bang on the moon I think it would, presumably, accelerate it – perhaps enough for it to reach escape velocity. But basically I think the secret is to do things convincingly, and then people will go along with it."

With *Space: 1999* there was definitely a difference between the first and the second series. The first was more serious SF, and the second all bug-eyed monsters and strange clouds in space. What was the decision made there, and was it yours or was it foist upon you?

"It was foist upon me. At the end of the first series, ITC in America – who had a lot of clout because the American market was so important – said: 'We must have an American head writer.' I selected Freddy Freiberger because of his *Star Trek* experience. When he came over, I said: 'Listen, you're going to take a producers credit, because you're going to be responsible for what you do, and I'm not going to have you do just whatever you want and have me carry the can.'

"I remember one day he came in and said I've got this amazing script called 'The Rules of Luton.' And I said Luton? Where did you get that from? And he said: 'Oh, I saw it on a signpost coming to the studio.' I don't think he was really in tune with the show."

The dates often seem to be incredibly close into the future in your stuff. *Space Precinct* isn't set in any particular year, is it?

"I've always said that it's science fantasy, and

have avoided putting a date up on the screen. I mean, there is a date, but then it becomes Brogan's number, so it's intentionally there to create confusion. The thing is, okay, we can travel to other planets, so that means it's got to be the year 2500, but in the year 2500 the New York police aren't going to be the New York police, so all the fun goes out of the window. So I'm tending to say: 'Listen, it's the day after tomorrow, why worry about it?'

"Back when we were doing *Space: 1999*, the end of the century seemed an incredibly long way off. 1999 was just so remote it seemed like anything could happen by then..."

A lot of the puppet shows are set around the year 2060. Did you ever think they'd all know each other – Captain Scarlet, Troy Tempest, Scott Tracy and so on?

"I didn't ever think of the shows being linked, but when they made two comics based on my programmes, *TV-21* and *Lady Penelope*, the editorial teams started to embellish and cross over, so today a lot of people think they're linked. For me, though, there's no real connection, and there are good commercial reasons why you can't link them. For instance, if Coca-Cola was to sponsor *Thunderbirds* in the States, it sure as hell doesn't want to find out that *Stingray* – a show it's linked to – is sponsored by Pepsi. So I really have to keep them separate."

Your shows are very big in Britain, but how have they done in the US?

"Well, the first show that went to the States was *Fireball XL-5*, which went onto NBC – an amazing achievement, because in that day and age it was very difficult to get British shows on at all, let alone get them networked. Then *Supercar* came along, actually at a point when ITC was in the throws of closing down. Then there was *Stingray*, which was the first colour film production made in Britain, and that did well.

Thunderbirds didn't do so well in America, but I have to be careful in explaining why. You see, Lew Grade took it to the States, and NBC and CBS both wanted it. When he got back, he was tannoyed at London airport, and heard that ABC wanted it too, which meant all three American networks were chasing the show, which was unheard of. The problem was, he then jacked the price up to such an extent that all three networks backed out, meaning he had to put the show out on regional syndication instead. The problem there was he insisted we went out at 8.30pm – when, of course, it bombed.

"[Parker's] voice was actually based on a waiter called Arthur who used to serve us in a nice English pub we'd go to for lunch. Arthur would serve the meal and at the end he'd come over and start chatting to us, and he'd soon get into telling us stories – 'Ho yes, when I worked for Her Majesty in Windsor Castle...'"

"*Scarlet* did well, but then it started to tail off. *UFO* was in syndication, and it led the ratings in the New York and Los Angeles areas for 17 consecutive weeks, but it never got a saturation showing across the country. And *Space: 1999* didn't do so well either, although it's quite popular now."

How did *The Secret Service* and *The Protectors* come about? They seem like real oddballs.

"Basically, *The Secret Service* dealt with a vicar who was a member of the secret service, hence the name. He was played by the actor Stanley Unwin, and it was an odd mixture of puppets and live action. If he was driving his model T Ford through a village, we'd film the real Stanley Unwin, but once he got out and walked through an entrance we'd go to the puppet. There were lots of interesting little details to that show. If Stanley Unwin ever got into a tight corner – like he was being questioned by the police, say – he would go into that gobbledegook voice of his, throw everybody off totally, and get out of it that way.

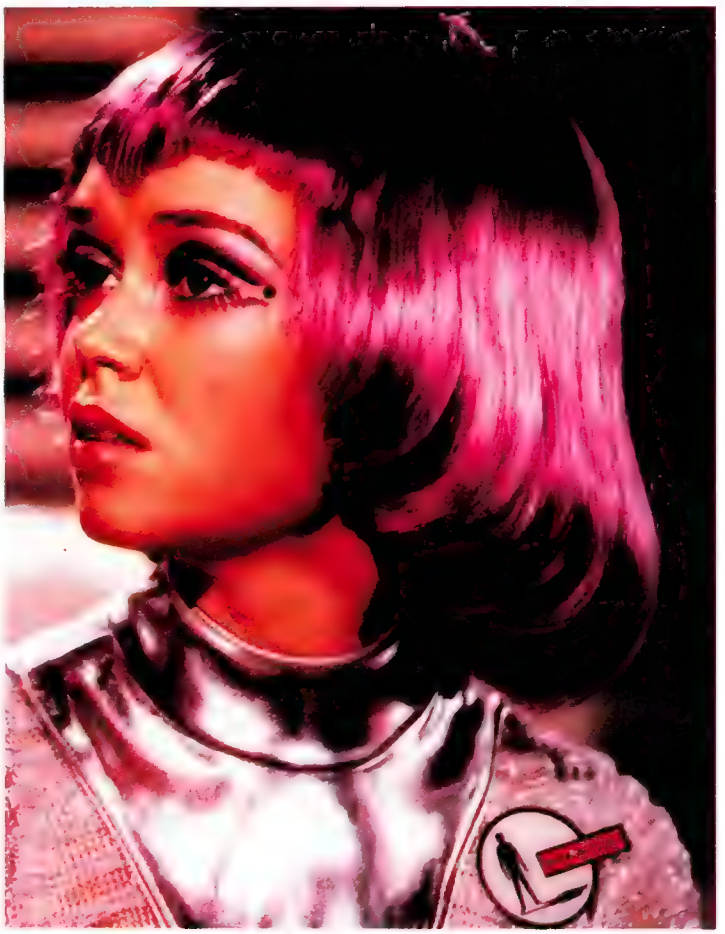
Joe 90's car – perhaps the least space-efficient vehicle *ever* – swoops low over the waves.

"It didn't do well, though. I took the show up to Lew Grade, and he was watching it, but when Stanley Unwin went into his nonsense voice, Lew just went 'Stop it! Take it off! Cancel it! They'll never understand that in America.' So that was the end of that.

"*The Protectors* was another weird one. I went to see Lew one day, and he gave me a piece of A4 – on it were four paragraphs which said, basically, *'The Protectors* are a group of people who operate outside the law, and solve mysteries.' He said: 'Want to do it?' and I said 'Okay.' I don't think I ever even knew whose idea it was originally – I was just given that piece of paper and sent away to make it.

How much did you enjoy doing that sort of show?

"I conflicted a great deal with Robert Vaughn – though he'll probably



(Sigh.) It's Gabrielle Drake as Lt Gay Ellis, fashion-leading defender of Earth from *UFO*.

Back, back in time we go – to 1962, in fact, and Mike Mercury and chum Venus exploring an alien planet in *Fireball XL5*. Sadly, we couldn't find a picture of the great Zoonie ("the space pet").

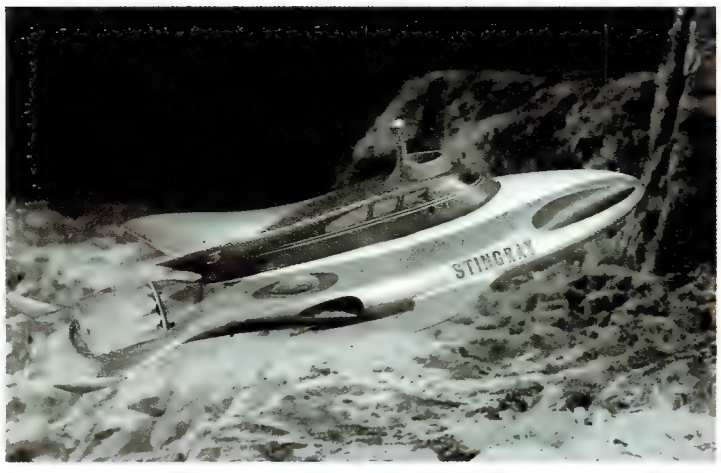
say he conflicted a great deal with Gerry Anderson, which is equally true. It didn't make it a happy experience, although we did a lot of travelling, which was nice. We went all over Europe."

It seems strange that a lot of your shows have been big hits, but haven't lasted all that long. Why is that?

"If we'd been an American company, the shows would have gone on... The government doesn't support us, so we just soldier on. And because TV fantasy costs such a lot, I've been the only idiot to persevere with it over the years."

So what does the future hold for Gerry Anderson?

"Well, I hope *Space Precinct* will resume for a second series in the new year, and I'm hoping to make some feature films based on the properties PolyGram hold too. I'd like to revive *Dick Spanner*, and I've got a couple of new projects in the pipeline too. There's one with the working title of *Ape Man,* although I can't tell you much about that just yet."



seaQuest, take note. *This* is what a submarine should look like. The great *Stingray* (1964).

"I conflicted a great deal with Robert Vaughn [who played Harry Rule on *The Protectors*] – though he'll probably say he conflicted a great deal with Gerry Anderson, which is equally true. It didn't make it a very happy experience, although we did do a lot of travelling, which was nice. We went all over Europe..."

And you never think about giving up?

"No, not at all. I get up in the morning and go to the studio because I want to, because it's exciting, and because we're making great things... What the hell do I want to retire for? Maybe they'll put me out to grass one of these days, but I won't do it to myself. As long as I'm still able to kick and scream as they drag me out, I won't mind."

Gerry Anderson, thank you very much.

THE LONG AND ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER OF LORD GERRY OF ANDERSON

SOME OF HIS SHOWS, LIKE THUNDERBIRDS, ARE INDELIBLE ICONS, ETCHED ONTO OUR COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS. OTHERS, LIKE TORCHY THE BATTERY BOY, ARE NEAR-FORGOTTEN MEMORIES. ALL OF THEM, HOWEVER, ARE – IN THEIR OWN SWEET, INNOCENT WAY – BRILLIANT. JOIN **MJ SIMPSON** FOR A LONG-OVERDUE WALK DOWN SUPERMARIONATION MEMORY LANE...

THE ADVENTURES OF TWIZZLE (1957)

The eponymous woollen-hatted star of this unequivocally kiddy series lived in Stray Town, a home for stray toys. Able to extend his legs and arms in not-quite-Mr-Fantastic manner, he was aided by a cat named Footso. Of interest only to Anderson completists.

TORCHY THE BATTERY BOY (1960)

Another toy-in-place-where-mistreated-toys-go show. Doll-with-lamp-in-hat Torchy's claims of clockwork power were ridiculous in light of the hefty cables holding him up. He was aided by toy poodle Pom-Pom. SF elements included rocket travel and Squish the Space Boy (now a popular, but illegal, hobby).

FOUR FEATHER FALLS (1960)

Introduced Supermarionation – the use of electromagnetic solenoids to synchronise mouth movement with pre-recorded voice tracks. A notable lack of SF, but the fantasy aspect centred around four magic quills in Sheriff Tex Tucker's hat, giving speech (Kenneth Connor) to dog Dusty and horse Rocky, and enabling non-manipulative operation of Tex's two six-shooters. Nicholas Parsons voiced Tex, except when he sang.

SUPERCAR (1961)

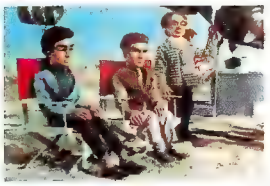
Hurrah! Gerry's primary venture into full-throttle sci-fi brilliance centred on a prototype car/plane/rocket/sub piloted by heroic Mike Mercury. Professor Popkiss and Doctor Beaker invented the vehicle, which blasted through two seasons of adventures. Also featured cute kid Jimmy Gibson, his pet monkey Mitch, and overweight, evil nemesis Masterspy.

FIREBALL XL5 (1962)

Disturbingly phallic spaceship piloted by heroic Steve Zodiac and crewed by the Honor Blackman-esque Venus, the punningly-named Professor Matthew Matic and perspex automaton Robert the Robot (voiced by Gerry himself). On behalf of the curiously named World Space Patrol, they explored space and met exactly two members each of assorted alien races. Zoonie the Lazoon took over the Mitch the Monkey role.

STINGRAY (1964)

First ever British TV series made in colour – and brilliant with it! Blatantly James Garner-styled Troy Tempest piloted the supersub, aided by "Phones" Sheridan and non-speaking aqua-babe Marina. The oceans proved to be surprisingly full of unknown races, each of whom – like the previous show's aliens – could only ever generate two individual representatives. Main opponents were King Titan and his aquaphibian-crewed Terror Fish. Commander Sam Shore was possibly the first ever disabled puppet character, and his daughter Atlanta's unrequited love for Troy introduced sexual tension to the Anderson canon. Pet seal Oink replaced Zoonie. Gary Miller replaced Don Spencer.



THUNDERBIRDS (1965)

Expansion to an hour-including-adverts time slot provided for more complex stories, but usually resulted in tedious "character" sequences. Thunderbird 1's swimming pool-covered launch bay vied for memorability with Thunderbird 2's collapsible palm trees. Feel sorry for John, who spent nearly every episode stuck in Thunderbird 5.

THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO! (1966) THUNDERBIRD SIX (1968)

Sadly unsuccessful big-screen outings for the cast. The first film famously featured puppets of Cliff Richard and The Shadows in a dream sequence when Alan briefly forgets Tintin for an older woman infatuation with Lady Penelope. Thunderbird 6 turned out to be a Gypsy Moth biplane, although sad cases may recall it was also the name of the dustcart in obscure early '70s sitcom *The Bin Men*.

CAPTAIN SCARLET & THE MYSTERONS (1967)

Miniaturisation techniques allowed for more realistic puppets which, combined with Tarantino-ish level of violence – at least one on-screen death per episode guaranteed – made *Captain Scarlet* the coolest and most realistic of all Anderson puppet shows. Like an early *Reservoir Dogs*, the members of Spectrum were code-named by colour and not averse to displays of excessive firepower. Cary Grant clone Scarlet was indestructible by virtue of having been rebuilt by the Mysterons.

Multi-ethnic force included French (Destiny Angel), Chinese (Harmony Angel), half-Swedish (Capt. Blue) and Trinidadian (Lt. Green) members.

JOE 90 (1968)

Tragic miscalculation on Anderson's part saw him aiming more firmly than ever at a kiddie audience by introducing a kiddy hero. The BIG RAT device was used to transfer expert knowledge and skills into nine year old Joe via heavy-duty spectacles. Not a patch on its predecessors.

THE SECRET SERVICE (1969)

The most obscure Gerry Anderson series, only ever shown once in three ITV regions. Combining live action with Supermarionation, legendary gobbledegook-speaker Stanley Unwin starred as himself, playing a priest who uses a miniaturisation device to hide secret agent Matthew Harding in his briefcase. Thus puppet Matthew functioned in real sets as one-third scale Matthew. Intriguing combination of puppets in close-ups and actors in long shots allowed for the first ever realistic walking scenes. Either a charming and scandalously undervalued series or a load of old tosh. You decide.

UFO (1970)

Gerry's first live-action series, slammed by cynics in typical "couldn't tell it wasn't puppets" fashion, but praised by fans as one of the very few SF TV shows to deal with genuine science fictional ideas. Ed Bishop was Commander Straker, leader of covert anti-alien organisation SHADO, whose base was concealed beneath a film studio. George Sewell played his second-in-command, with a pre-*Crossroads* Gabrielle Drake as Moonbase Commander, replete with purple wig.

ITV stations were unable to square "serious, adult SF" with "Gerry Anderson" – or even "serious" and "adult" with "SF" – and scheduling varied wildly.

THE PROTECTORS (1972)

Enjoyable, but unremarkable, standard ITC non-specific secret agents show starring sometime UNCLE agent Robert Vaughn as Harry Rule, Nyree Dawn Porter as Italian Contessa Di Contini, and Tony Anholt as The Other One. Groovy theme song by Tony Christie.

SPACE: 1999 (1975)

Proposed second series of *UFO* mutated into this bizarre British *Star Trek*, set aboard a moon ripped out of orbit by a nuclear explosion. Husband and wife Martin Landau and Barbara Bain (both ex-*Mission Impossible*) played commander and doctor, with Barry Morse as top scientist Prof Bergman. Second season saw Bergman disappear and Maya – a sort of alien, female Manimal – join the team. Poor scripts, crap monsters, but *great* spaceships.

TERRAHAWKS (1983)

Gerry Anderson's wilderness years ended with this unabashed *Thunderbirds* rip-off which was pooh-poohed at the time, but now exudes a certain nostalgic charm. Large-headed, stringless puppets were operated by Supermacromation. Dr "Tiger" Ninestein commanded the organisation, which featured glamorous, pink-haired pop star Kate Kestrel. Ugly alien Zelda fought for control of Earth using a variety of monsters and her Cube robots, which the Terrahawks countered with the Windsor Davies-commanded Zeroids. Okay, a bit crap, but the only Gerry Anderson series to last a whopping three seasons.

DICK SPANNER (1987)

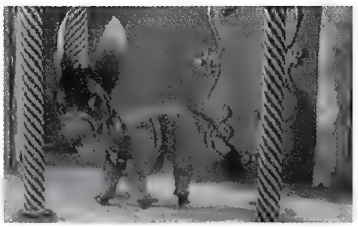
Bizarre stop-motion series about a robotic Bogart-type private dick. Originally presented in five-minute segments as the only watchable part of dreadful "youth TV" experiment *Network 7*. Notable primarily for plethora of visual and narrative puns.

SPACE PRECINCT (1986-ERM-95)

Pilot "Space Police" episode – never shown on TV – starred Scott Tracy/*Dick Spanner* voice Shane Rimmer as Lt Brogan, assisted by cat-like aliens. Entered production eight years later with Ted Shackleford and no cats. Currently wowing Sky One viewers and heading BBC-wards soon.

The sinister Torchy (aka Jimmy Somerville).

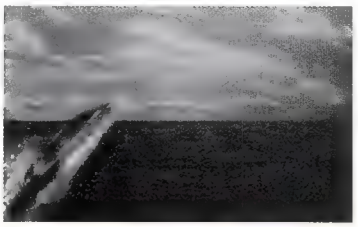
"Well, I certainly didn't vote for you."



A donkey with "the collywobbles."

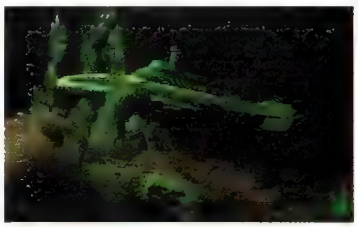
Popkiss and Beaker, *Supercar* baldies both.

Supercar (the wonder of the age). Yesterday.



It can fly, float, swim and make the tea.

Mike Mercury and his large eyebrows.



Stingray – a first for colour on Brit TV!

"Hey, hey – Atlanta, you come with me."

"Phones" Sheridan has a fetish for tartan.

Note the position of Troy's right hand. Slut!

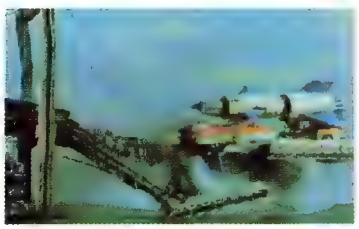
She exists! The, er, fearsome Nessie.

A rare shot of Thunderbird 2 landing.

It's the kid from our *Voyager* feature!

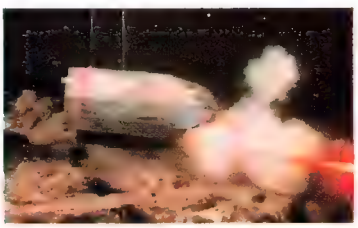
Thunderbird 1 looks a bit weedy next to 2.

Tintin rarely wore an IR uniform. Shame...



There goes that there bridge (again).

Proof! Pod 3 contains the elevator cars.



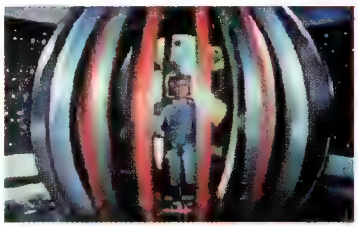
Thunderbirds/Scarlet crossover – the MEV.

Captain Brown (left) won't last long.

The MCV (Maximum Security Vehicle).

Don't trust Scarlet – it's episode one!

Angel Interceptors – Airfix did these.



Joe 90 in the giant swirling BIG RAT.

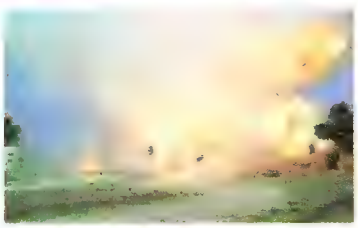
"Happy birthday, Joe – you're *ten* today!"

Clearly a reconditioned Angel Interceptor.

Gabriel, the miniature car in *Secret Service*.

Vicars *are* more fun than little boys...

Shock horror! Man found in suitcase!



Even *Secret Service* had big explosions...

Straker's car – Dinky made one of these too.

SHADO commander/film mogul Ed Straker.

All screenshots © PolyGram Filmed Entertainment

THE INCOMPLETE WORKS OF GERRY ANDERSON

RED ALERT! ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN IN THE NEXT FIVE HOURS. THOUGH, MOST LIKELY, NOT MUCH WILL. EXCEPT THAT A MOTLEY BUNCH OF SFX WRITERS WILL EAT PIZZA, DRINK STELLA AND WATCH SOME – OKAY, MAKE THAT A LOT OF – GERRY ANDERSON VIDEOS. **DAVE GOLDER** PULLS THE STRINGS...

Over the past 40 years Gerry Anderson has produced some 16 different TV series. Some are household names or popular cult viewing; others almost completely forgotten, except by hardcore fans or people who scour Woolworth's video bargain bins.

In other words, Gerry's produced some dross, some *bona fide* classics, and a lot of stuff in-between. In a rash moment of bravado, then, SFX decided to put the entire Anderson back catalogue to the ultimate test – a Couch Potato session. Admittedly, we had problems tracking everything down (no *Four Feathers Falls, Fireball XL-5, Twizzle* or *Dick Spanner,* I'm afraid) but at least that meant we were all likely to get to bed before 4am.

In the end, seven brave souls made it to the vid session, armed only with a crate of lager and some pizza, namely SFX editor Matt, staff writer Simo, Karen (a Trekker), Andy (a Dinky Toy fanatic), Zy (from Slough, where Anderson made many of his early shows), Nick (an SF TV junkie) and myself, the adjudicator. To maintain sanity it was agreed that a vote by three members of the panel would force the use of the fast-forward button to "a good bit," while a vote by four would zoom us straight on to the next video.

7pm Torchy The Battery Boy (1960) "The Toys Get The Collywobbles"

An early black and white effort for kids set in Topsy Turvy Land, where neglected toys go for group hug sessions. Torchy is a wind-up clockwork boy who gets ideas by pressing a switch and lighting up a torch in his cap. In this thrilling instalment, all the toys start getting stomach pains, which they call, quaintly, "the collywobbles."

Nick: *"So, basically, they all had a bad curry last night, yes?"*
Andy: *"Don't you reckon Torchy looks just like Jimmy Somerville?"*
Karen: *"It's all a bit spooky-looking, isn't it? If I was a kid it'd scare me half to death."*
Andy: *"I bet there wasn't much spin-off merchandising from this."*

Cut to a panning shot of Toyland at night, accompanied by a chorus of groans coming from various abodes.
Matt: *"Sounds like they've all got very bad period pains."*
Andy: *"Or it's TV's first orgasm scene."*

Then we get to the moral of the story. The King of Toyland tells the toys to eat fewer sweets and more greens.
Matt: *"Oh God, it's gone into* TNG *mode."*
Simo: *"Nah, I reckon the old fruit's just got a carrot fetish."*
Matt: (As a donkey appears on-screen) *"I'm not sure that's what he's got a fetish for..."*

Suddenly, the characters burst into song, in ear-piercingly high-pitched voices.
Andy: *"It is Jimmy Somerville!"*
Simo: *"Switch it off!"*
Nick: *"Can it get any worse?"*
Dave: *"Was that a fourth vote I heard?"*

Off goes *Torchy.*

7.10pm Supercar (1961) "Rescue"

This is the series pilot in which hero Mike Mercury goes on his first mission in the vehicle that can fly, hover, travel in space, zoom over water, but has trouble with speed bumps. When a plane crashes into the sea, the survivors – a father, his son and their super-intelligent ape – suffer exposure waiting in a dinghy for a few days while Supercar's inventors quibble about last-minute tests.

Karen: *"Oh God – that's not Mike Mercury, is it?*
Mike: *"It certainly is."*
Karen: *"But he's hideous. Look at those eyes – and those eyebrows!"*
Simo: *"Yes, I think you'll find bushy eyebrows are a theme of early Anderson. It's the way you can tell the women apart from the men."*

The tests on Supercar go on. And on...
Mike: *"Fast-forward! Where's the launch?"*

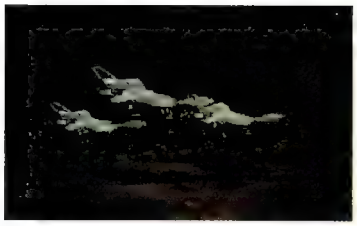
Supercar finally takes off vertically, despite the previous quarter of an hour being devoted to the workings of its rear thrusters.
Matt: *"That thing's got one hell of a turning circle. It'd be great for parking if it didn't take up three parking spaces."*
Karen: *"Hey, cool. Dark glasses!"*

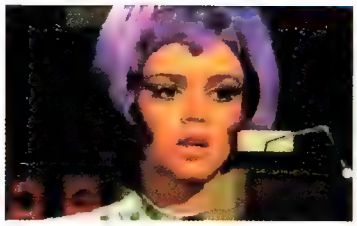
Finally, the crash victims are rescued. The monkey has a silly grin on its face, but we'll disregard Simo's comment about spanking. End credits roll.

7.30pm Stingray (1964) "Loch Ness Monster"

No *Fireball XL-5,* so it's straight into the sub-aqua saga known as *Stingray.*

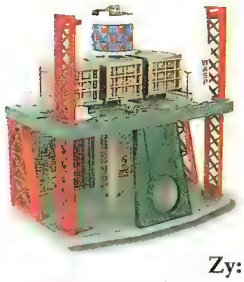
Matt: *"Colour at last."*
Simo: *"It was, of course, the very first British programme of any kind to be made in colour."*
Karen: *"Is it in stereo?"*
Simo: *"No, the first programme to be made*


Classic interceptor fly-by from *UFO*.


We'll all be wearing purple wigs one day...

...and 21st century string vests too.

Nyree, Bob, but no Tony in *The Protectors*.



in stereo in the UK was The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy *in 1981...*"

Karen: *"That Troy Tempest is a lot better-looking than Mike Mercury, luckily..."*

Mike: *"Personally, I always had a crush on Atlanta. She's a babe."*

Zy: *"She's a two-foot high marionette."*

Karen: *"I always wanted to be Marina."*

Matt: *"But she couldn't talk."*

Nick: *"Are you sure it wasn't other people who wanted you to be Marina?"*

In this episode, Troy, Phones and Atlanta travel to Scotland to discover the truth behind the Loch Ness Monster. One riddle is quickly cleared up when Nessie finally appears:

Matt: *"Ah look. Those eyes have been handed down from Torchy and Mike Mercury. She doesn't have the eyebrows though. Must be a female Nessie."*

Simo: *"Atlanta's got lovely eyebrows. And she wears a great nightie later on."*

Dave: *"Er, anyone want some pizza?"*

Troy, Phones and Atlanta stay in a castle at the edge of Loch Ness. They landlords have crap Scottish accents, and – being the only other characters in the episode – are obviously the villains. Our heroes are a bit too dense to realise this, however, and explore the castle in the middle of the night to find out the source of some strange noises.

Nick: *"Nessie's got the collywobbles."*

Troy Tempest (on-screen): "You go that way, Phones. Atlanta, come with me."

Matt: *"Hey, Phones, don't fall for that one!"*

Simo: *"This is the only episode where Atlanta gets Troy to herself."*

Rich (Dave's flatmate, arriving home): *"I hate Gerry Anderson."* He vanishes upstairs.

The episode climaxes with a chase between Stingray and Nessie. Nessie is blown up and turns out to be (shock!) a robot created by the dodgy Scots to attract tourists.

Matt: *"That was pretty good. The first one yet that we haven't fast-forwarded at all."*

8pm Thunderbirds (1965) "Security Hazard"

The jewel in Anderson's crown, *Thunderbirds* was the first hour-long Supermarionation series.

Matt: *"The clips at the beginning are brilliant. A great bit of music and the best bits from the episode."*

Simo: *"But these ones looked like they came from totally different episodes..."*

Nick (Reading the back of the video): *"'Each of the Tracy brothers in turn tell a young boy about their heroic exploits.'"*

Matt: *"A flashback episode!"*

Yep, this is, indeed, merely an opportunity to string together a lot of old clips. A young boy stows away aboard Thunderbird 2 and is flown back to Tracy Island. Jeff believes he's a possible security hazard, but this doesn't stop his sons telling the boy about their exploits, each trying to convince the lad his ship is best.

Matt: *"Ah well, at least we should get loads of good bits of action. John's going to have a hard time making Thunderbird 5 sound exciting, though."*

Andy: *"I had a Thunderbird 2. One of the green ones, before they ran out of green paint and made them all blue instead. The green ones are more rare, you know."*

"Vicars are always more fun than little boys... Er, don't print that one, will you?"

Simo on *Secret Service*

Simo: *"Ah, now what were in all those pods? Two was the Mole, I think, and three had those little electric cars..."*

Zy: (Watching Thunderbird 3 take off) *"Pool needs a clean."*

Karen: *"I bet when it's landing they just play the same shot backwards."*

Simo: *"Don't be an arse. The smoke would go back into the engines."*

Zy: (Spotting a '60s-style computer) *"Oh look, flashing lights!"*

Andy: *"They nick those off Morris Minors, you know."*

As the flashbacks continue, it soon becomes clear certain popular *Thunderbirds* characters are entirely missing. Swizz.

Matt: *"Where's Parker?"*

Simo: *"There's been no Hood, either, although he was originally in that episode they showed a clip from where the plane almost crashes. That was the pilot episode, by the way. He was Kyrano's half-brother, and Tin Tin's Uncle, but they haven't been in this story yet, either..."*

Andy: *"Hang on. This bit's from my favourite episode, the one where the bridge collapses. I tried to make this in lego when I was a kid."*

Matt: *"This is getting dull. Fast-forward?"*

Nick: *"No, we've got to watch the end where they show you bits of the machines and you have to try to guess which is which before they pull out to reveal them."*

Zy: *"Yeah, right."*

8.50pm Captain Scarlet (1967) "The Mysterons"

Roars of displeasure ensue when it becomes clear that this is not a real episode of *Captain Scarlet*, but a re-edited version released on video in the early '80s without the proper opening credits, and with three episodes spliced into one. The first third, however, is from the pilot, so we agree to watch it up until it becomes obvious that the plot has changed for no apparent reason.

Here, Captain Black and Captain Scarlet have both been taken over by the Mysterons, who have to kill their victims before they can take control of them. However, Scarlet ultimately overcomes the Mysterons' hold over him and, since he's already dead, becomes indestructible.

Matt: *"Technically-speaking, it's a real advance over* Thunderbirds."

Simo: *"The heads are much smaller and they walk better."*

Nick: *"The eyes have been improved too. They must have lost Torchy's."*

Simo: *"This bit on the moon where the Mysterons get Captain Black – it's supposed to be part of the same mission that takes place in the film* Thunderbirds Are Go."

Matt: *"But Anderson always maintains there is no link between the shows."*

Karen: *"That, bum-bum-bum-de-bum-bum-bum bit between scenes is great."*

Matt: *"Chris Evans certainly thinks so."*

Zy: *"It must be hell that everyone in Spectrum seems to be of the same rank."*

Matt: *"And at some time or other they must run out of colours, surely?"*

Nick: *"It's a bit like* Reservoir Dogs *– 'I don't wanna be Captain Pink.'"*

Matt: (As Captain Brown is used as a human bomb by the Mysterons) *"Hmm, it's very nasty in places."*

Simo: *"Yes, it got into a lot of trouble for that at the time. Themically, it's quite adult."*

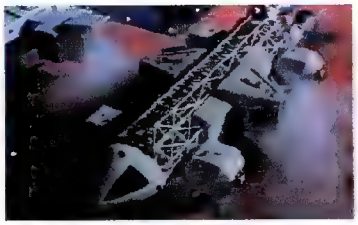
Andy: *"The cars are great. I love the way the drivers face backwards. I'm pretty certain I had a model of one."*

Matt: (As we switch off after half an hour with no fast-forwarding) *"That was great."*

9.20pm Joe 90 (1968) "The Birthday"

This is the one about the nine year old boy

Eartha Kitt vamps it up post-Catgirl.


The Eagle has landed...

Bela Lugosi meets Captain Gerard.

So *that's* where Babs Windsor went...

who, thanks to a device called BIG RAT, can absorb the memories and skills of other people. He's then used by the British Secret Service for special missions. As soon as this one's past the opening credits, two things soon become clear:

Matt: *"I don't believe it! It's another bleedin' flashback episode."*
And...
Andy: *"This is a bit dull."*
The title sequence with Big Rat in operation proves to be popular.
Karen: *"It looks like one of those machines in Super Snaps – your prints'll be ready in about an hour."*
Matt: *"Joe's a bit like the Macaulay Culkin of the '60s. Only a better actor."*
Dave: *"Four votes for off then?"*

9.30pm Secret Service (1969) "The Cure"

No-one has seen *Secret Service* before, so we're not quite sure what to expect here. Mixing live action and puppets, it stars Stanley Unwin (in both live action and puppet form) as a priest who's also a secret agent. His assistant is some bloke who gets shrunk and carried around in the priest's briefcase. It's all very bizarre. The episode we watched has Unwin (that's the name of the character as well, strangely) going to a health farm to stop spies from blowing up a racing car with explosive fuel.

Matt: *"Well, it's better than* Joe 90."
Simo: *"Vicars are always more fun than little boys... Er, don't print that one, will you?"*
Karen: *"I'm not too keen on the theme tune."*
Andy: *"That model car they used was good."*
Nick: *"But why did it keep changing size? And what governed what was live action and what was puppets? And why's Stanley Unwin playing Stanley Unwin?"*
Andy: *"All that swapping around between models, puppets and live action just makes the puppets look even more unrealistic."*
Matt: *"You can't imagine this looking good even on paper. How did it ever get made?"*
Dave: "It lasted longer tonight than *Joe 90*."
Matt: "That was just novelty value."

9.55pm UFO (1970) "ESP"

The first fully live action Anderson series featured SHADO, an organisation devoted to the defence of Earth from alien invaders. Lead characters include Commander Straker (Ed Bishop) and Colonel Freeman (George Sewell). It's very *Captain Scarlet*, with real actors and more subdued clothing. Set in 1980, the episode under scrutiny concerns a bloke with ESP and a UFO which crashlands into his house, killing his wife.

Matt: *"Cool music."*
Karen: *"Why are they wearing string vests?"*
Simo: *"21st century fashion, that."*
Nick: *"There's no excuse for purple wigs..."*
Simo: *"Apparently, they were anti-static."*
Zy: *"Yeah, right."*
Matt: (Immediately after the UFO crash) *"That was brilliant. These effects are great. I loved the interceptors as well."*
Nick: *"Pity they only carry one missile each."*
Karen: *"Do you think Bishop dyes his hair?"*
Nick: *"I hope it's not natural, for his sake."*
Matt: *"Fast-forward to some more effects bits. It's getting a bit dull."*
Simo: *"Well,* UFO *was always the more human interaction-based series."*
Matt: *"It's all so stilted though. The actors are better than puppets, but only just."*
Simo: *"I think they're acting very naturally. That's how you would act if you worked somewhere like SHADO."*

10.35pm The Protectors (1972) "A Pocketful of Posies"

Robert Vaughn, Nyree Dawn Porter and Tony Anholt star as the jet-setting crimefighters in this series of half-hour, Bond-influenced adventures. However, the episode we watch opens with Eartha Kitt wandering around her apartment looking confused. Then it continues with Eartha Kitt singing. Then there's more Eartha Kitt... Hang on, where are the stars?

Andy: *"It's another great theme tune. Number 37 in 1973 for Tony Christie, I believe."*
Nick: *"I hope it's got some loud shirts in it."*
Zy: *"Why isn't Tony Anholt in the titles?"*
Matt: *"It's got a lot of Eartha Kitt..."*
Minutes of fast-forwarding reveal a brief moment of Robert Vaughn, but not much else in the way of stars or action.
Matt: *"Sod this. Let's put on* Space: 1999."

10.40 pm Space: 1999 (1975) "The Last Enemy"

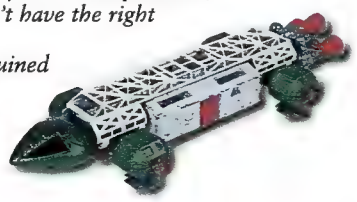
When the moon is blown out of orbit, the inhabitants of Moonbase Alpha have to endure a nomadic existence in space. "The Last Enemy" is a first season episode (in other words, no bug-eyed monsters, but we get Barry Morse to make up for it) in which Commander Koenig (Martin Landau) plays peace-keeping diplomat to two warring planets, and Barbara Bain stands around looking concerned.

Matt: *"The Eagles are just stunning."*
Karen: *"The sets are a bit naff, though. The main control room looks like a canteen."*
Nick: *"Great flares. Looks like they nicked them off The Stylistics."*
Karen: *"Or The Eagles!"*
Simo: *"They just said those two planets are on the opposite side of the same sun, so they can't see each other. That sounds familiar. Gerry Anderson's own film,* Doppelganger, *I think you'll find."*
Karen: *"Has Barbara Bain actually said anything yet?"*
Andy: *"Barry Morse is zombie-like too."*
Matt: *"Ah, that's because he's got a mechanical heart. That makes him so emotionless. Apparently."*
One of the planets appears to be inhabited by leather-clad women. They offer Koenig the opportunity for the inhabitants of Moonbase Alpha to live on their planet.
Karen: *"I bet he accepts."*
Simo: *"I would."*
Matt: *"It looks like it had a lot of money spent on it. Some of the effects look better than* Space Precinct's, *and this is years old."*
Dave: *"Wow, another complete, fast-forward-less episode."*
Nick: *"That was the best so far..."*

11.40 pm Terrahawks (1983) "Expect The Unexpected"

Anderson's mid-'80s effort is very much a re-run of *Thunderbirds*, but this time the figures are hand puppets rather than marionettes. It's back to half hour episodes as well. Or it would be if this wasn't yet another of those hideous compilation videos where three episodes have been spliced together.

Nick: *"Oh God, misshapen heads again."*
Karen: *"And their mouths go all funny when they talk."*
Andy: *"The ships are poor too."*
Nick: *"What a step back from* Space: 1999! *It doesn't even look as good as* Thunderbirds."
Nick: *"The sphere robots are good – except that camp one, stuck on the spacestation."*
Dave: *"Windsor Davies is fun as Colonel Zero. But you just can't take any of it seriously. The end's the best bit, where the goodie sphere robots play naughts and crosses with the baddie cube robots. The game was different every week and the goodies didn't always win. Fast-forward to that bit..."*
Nick: *"It's one of those compilations, Dave. They don't have the right ending."*
Dave: *"That's ruined my whole evening."*



SFX Profile

MAKE NO MISTAKE, THIS GIRL IS HOT!

X Appeal

GILLIAN ANDERSON REALLY CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT ALL THE FUSS IS ABOUT. OVERWORKED AND OVER HERE, SHE GIVES UP HER (WORKING) HOLIDAY TO TRY TO CONVINCE **DAVE GOLDER** THAT AGENT SCULLY IN THE X-FILES IS JUST ANOTHER HARD-WORKING GIRL. AND NOT SEXY AT ALL. OH NO...

"Thinking man's crumpet? Well, it's more flattering than being a lobotomised man's crumpet, I suppose..." Amazingly, Gillian Anderson doesn't understand what people are going on about. A sex symbol? Her? She can't see it herself.

"I don't particularly feel like a sex symbol," she laughs. "But then somebody asked me the other day what it was like to work with a sex god like David Duchovny, and I can't get that out of my head. *Sex god?*"

The woman known throughout 60 countries as FBI agent Dana Scully barely thinks of herself as a star, let alone a fantasy object. Try to get her to analyse the success of the programme, or her own role, or anything really, and she just shrugs it off... Amazingly, this is only her second TV role.

"I'd actually done an episode of one other thing called *Class of '96* a few months before I got *The X-Files*," she says matter-of-factly, "but that didn't lead to anything." It's almost as if she doesn't she realise she's an international star...

"I don't think it's hit me yet, to be honest," she laughs. "Well, I did think when we started work on season two that perhaps this thing might be going on for a while, because it seemed to be the only Fox show that was doing any good. We had a feeling we might be caught up in this for the long haul."

Long haul? She makes it sound a chore.

"It's insane! It's 12-16 hours a day, five days a week, ten months of the year. And then I spend my holidays working."

Ah. Presumably she's referring to the fact that while the show is in hiatus, she's being whisked around Europe on Fox publicity tours. I'd better get down to business, then.

SO WHAT WAS THE X-FILES LIKE AT THE start? Did series creator Chris Carter know exactly what he wanted?

"Chris had a very, very strong idea about who Mulder and Scully were, and he was very particular about how he wanted us to act in terms of their degree of intelligence, seriousness, and what drove them. He was very adamant about that. But in the long run it's the actor who plays the character, and, of course, there are interpretations and flavourings that will come into play. But I think we both have a similar idea who the character of Scully is anyway."

Back in the first episodes of the show particularly, but really through most of the first season, Scully was a bit of a sceptic. The audience was always going to side with Mulder, because he was the believer. Didn't she get fed up with being the obtuse one?

"Sure," Gillian smiles, "though she has loosened up a great deal recently. But there are times when it's frustrating being the negative energy in a situation."

Certainly, in the season two episode, "Excelsis Dei," where ghosts molest the residents of an old peoples' home, the roles of sceptic and believer are completely reversed...

"Yes, in that case they were, but that was because it was a rape story. But, yes,

© Craig Sternett

"I don't particularly feel like a sex symbol. But then somebody asked me the other day what it was like to work with a sex god like David Duchovny, and I can't get that out of my head. Sex god?"

"I'd like to see an alien very much. It wouldn't surprise me if there were a government cover-up. It seems so likely that there's something other than us in this universe."

beyond that there have actually been episodes in the second season where she is more ready to believe than Mulder."

So what's the best thing about playing Scully? What does Gillian really enjoy?

"Once in a while, a really good script comes along that deals more with what drives her and Mulder emotionally and psychologically. And they're the ones that are more challenging to work on, and, ultimately, the ones that make the best shows – things like 'Beyond the Sea,' and 'Irresistible'. So I guess that if I had any wish, it would be that there would be more of those episodes...

"Actually, there was another one that was a lot of fun," she grins. "In 'Humbug' we move into a town that's full of circus freaks. Are you familiar with Jim Rose? Well, his circus came to work with us. It was bizarre. One man hammers a nail into his nose on screen, and someone else eats a live fish."

ANDERSON DOES ADMIT SHE WOULD like to get to know more about Scully's private life. What does she do for fun? And who are her friends? There have been sightings of her family in the series, and the odd date, but little else...

"I would like to have more of that," she says. "But to run those sort of stories all the time would be inappropriate considering what the show's about. I think the audience wants it, though, and it would be interesting to see a little bit more of their personal lives."

Not that – to the disappointment of many – she thinks anything romantic will ever happen between the two leads.

"Everybody and their dog asks me that," she laughs. "But I don't think it's going to happen. The show's not about that, and what we have going right now seems to be working, and to alter that might destroy it."

So despite the gruelling schedule – and having to talk to people like me all the time – she has no plans to leave the show?

"No, I think it'll go on for about five years. Three more to go," she sighs stoically.

No worries about typecasting?

"I don't think so – the stuff that's being offered to me at the moment is a far cry from Scully. I haven't had any actual film offers yet, but there have been TV movies, although I haven't done any. The thing is, we haven't had the time to do the kind of auditioning other actors do, and I'm not sure I'd want to work over the hiatus, anyway."

OF COURSE, GILLIAN ANDERSON DID take one much-publicised break during the second season, when she gave birth to her daughter, Piper. Well, sort of. She only got one episode off, in fact – the one where Scully gets whisked off by aliens. The producers were kind enough to keep her in a coma for the episode where she returns, however.

"Yes, and I actually fell asleep during the coma scenes," she says sheepishly. "I'd just had Piper... I was in hospital for six days, and then I was back to work four days later. It was nice only to have to play being in a coma, but they could have put another episode with me off in space in between."

It was during her pregnancy that *that* raincoat came into its own – just the job to disguise the developing Piper. "It's funny," she says, "because David and I wear raincoats about the same amount of time in the series, but it's me that gets the comments about it. Actually, they're very necessary in the cold and wet of Vancouver, and I'm glad of them."

Ah, those soggy Vancouver forests, where two thirds of the episodes seem to take place. They're *The X-Files*' equivalent of *Doctor Who*'s Surrey gravel pits. "Well, that's all Vancouver has to offer," sighs Anderson.

So what about these rumours we hear that season three will feature some globe-trotting stories? Will you get out of Vancouver for at least a couple of episodes?

Perhaps not. "I don't know how they're going to do that," she says. "It's so expensive to shoot it as it is. They were trying to shoot one of the episodes in another part of Canada, and they found out that it was too costly, so they forgot about it. So to bring everybody over, or to get together another crew in England... I'd like to see it."

IT MAY COME AS A SURPRISE, BUT Gillian is no stranger to the UK – she spent six years in London when she was growing up, part of the time in Crouch End. "We actually drove through Crouch End once this visit," she says. "But we didn't stop. It was pissing with rain." Pissing? Yep, that definitely sounds like a Londoner.

Many of Gillian's favourite actors are British, too – Gary Oldman, Ralph Fiennes, Emma Thompson. When asked whether she'd like any of them to appear in *The X-Files*, though, she looks horrified...

"No! Well, it would be fabulous if Gary Oldman could step into the show for a day, and there has been some interest from a few stars, but wouldn't it end up distracting from the show? It might take the audience away from an environment and mood that we desperately need them to stay in."

It's a mood that seems to have got its claws into Gillian, certainly. She has no problems accepting some of the more bizarre goings-on depicted in the show, and admits to having been fascinated by the supernatural ever since she was a child.

"I'd like to see an alien very much," she confesses. "It wouldn't surprise me if there were a government cover-up. It seems so likely that there's something other than us in this universe... Cover-up is synonymous with government. It just *is*."

When it comes to the future of *The X-Files*, however, Gillian could be accused of organising a bit of a cover-up of her own...

"I don't even think Chris Carter knows what's going to happen," she says politically. However, she does let slip that her abduction in season two might have "repercussions..."

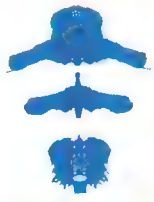
And if she wasn't in *The X-Files*, what does she think she'd be doing? "Sleeping."

At which point, I decide to leave her to put her feet up.

Now tell me about your mother...

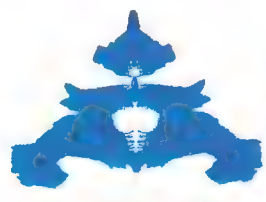
Never prepared to settle for what lesser mags would be happy with, SFX also interviews on a subconscious level. In this controlled test, we showed Gillian Anderson these scientifically-generated (yeah, right) Rorschach ink-blots, and then sat back and let her interpret them. And these were the psyche-shattering results... Nurse, the screens!

"Two lobsters doing the Tango."



"A Victorian bodice and some pelvic bones."

"Two ducks in a ballet with kissing penises."



"Er, two Scottie dogs being embraced by a Martian?"

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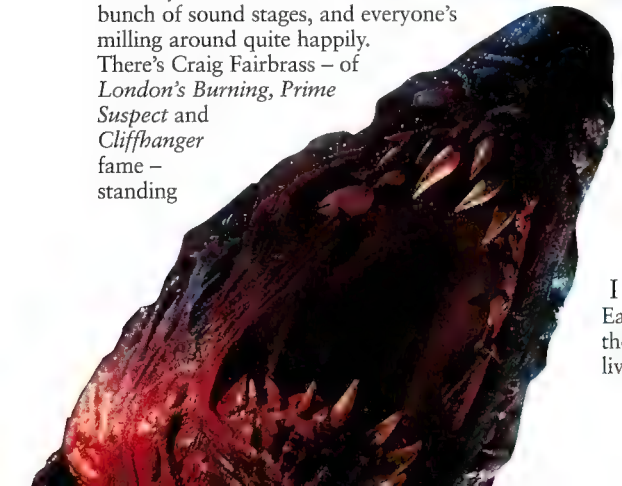
THE SMUGGLERS, THE COP AND THE VERY BIG FISH

Remember Craig Fairbrass? He's the English footie thug who (almost) beat up Sylvester Stallone in one memorable fight scene in Cliffhanger. Now he's set to try and do the same thing to a mutant shark-monster the size of a porky hippo on stilts. **Matt Bielby** visited the set of new British sci-fi/horror flick Proteus to see how he intends to do it...

***Proteus* is that rare beast – a science fiction film being produced in Britain, with a British director, British producer, British star and, to some extent at least, British money. Set on a mysterious oil rig somewhere off the Philippines, it pits a group of drug dealers and cops against a genetically engineered shape-shifting monster – a creature described as something like "a cross between a man and a Great White Shark."**

If you're thinking it all sounds familiar, you'd be right. "This is a sort of horror-sci-fi-action pic," explains producer Paul Brooks, "kind of like *Aliens* meets *The Thing* meets *Die Hard* meets *The Hidden*..."

It's a sunny Wednesday in April, and I'm on the set of *Proteus,* which happens to be just behind a Tesco near the Blackwall Tunnel in East London. We're in an old distillery which has been turned into a bunch of sound stages, and everyone's milling around quite happily. There's Craig Fairbrass – of *London's Burning, Prime Suspect* and *Cliffhanger* fame – standing around looking like a brick shithouse. He's the star, and fast becoming Britain's answer to Steven Seagal. Over to the left there's Doug Bradley of *Hellraiser* fame, looking almost unrecognisable without his Pinhead make-up. Director Bob Keen, ex-special effects wizard from films like *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Highlander,* is bustling about trying to find a new exterior location nearby.



Producer Paul and star Craig worked together on a film called *Beyond Bedlam* – a psychological horror flick also starring Liz Hurley and Keith Allen – a few years ago. It was only reasonably well received, but is currently doing good business on video. With Bob Keen, they're already well on their way to becoming a decent little repertory company – "We've built up a group of technicians and actors who are almost a regular group" says Bob – and are managing to raise decent funds for movies because they've proved they can do things quickly, to budget, and make money.

"We've got quite a bit of American, and some Japanese and German, money behind the film," says Paul, "while the rest has come from Victor Films in the UK. Raising finance has been okay, because *Bedlam* went down well in other territories."

Craig's quite the action star, isn't he?

"That's the plan. He did a film called *Terminal Force* in the States just before this, and he's got two back-to-back projects after it. I think he can go all the way."

I speak to Craig, a big, friendly East End lad with muscles I'd kill for and one of those orange tans that's probably half real – he lives in Los Angeles these days – and half down to a liberal coating in the make-up room. So, Craig – tell us about Alex, your character in the film. What sort of guy is he?

"He's an English detective working in Hong Kong," Fairbrass explains. "At the start, he infiltrates a group of American drug dealers who are running heroin to America, but then they all get shipwrecked and come across what they think is an oil rig. In fact, it's a laboratory where they're carrying out genetic engineering! After that, it's every man for himself."

And you do quite well, I take it.

"Yeah!"

The film sounds very much in the mould of things like *Aliens* and *The Abyss*...

"Yeah, with touches of *Predator* and *The Thing*. You've got your 20-minute climax of good guy versus the creature, and there's this huge action sequence, which all takes place in a big torrential storm."

And you're enjoying it?

"Oh yeah! I mean, it's a natural progression for me. They're saying, 'He's six foot three, he's physical, why don't we put him in action situations?' And I love it."

Has anyone ever tried to persuade you to fake an American accent?

"It hasn't happened yet. Paul said to me that one reason this film might work is that you need to have something different about a good action star. I mean, out of the top five action stars at the moment, Stallone's the only genuine American. With me what we're trying to export is what I am – you know, this is a street London boy, now let's put him in these situations."

Apart from Craig, the rest of the cast are American – essential if *Proteus* is to sell

Bloody hell! They don't get much nastier than *Proteus'* monster – a shape-changing mutant thing, with large elements of Great White. Truth be told, we're not sure Craig stands a chance...

Big trouble for Craig, flat on his back in the pouring rain, with only a giant shark monster for company. Some holiday this is turning out to be...

"Sinbad would make a great action hero!" Unfortunately, Jenny Calvert's looks seem to have gone rather downhill since her days on *Brookside*...

The calm before the storm. Guess which of these two survives...?

Jenny Calvert – undercover cop, and probably not long for this world...

"Out of the top five action stars at the moment, Stallone's the only genuine American. With me, what we're trying to export is what I am – you know, this street London boy..."

Craig Fairbrass, actor

abroad. Toni Barry is the film's female lead, and plays Linda, the female survivor who ends up fighting for her life alongside Craig.

"She's a nurse and wonderful, actually," she reveals. "She's the only character in the entire film who has no involvement in drugs. My boyfriend in *Proteus* does, and the back story is that he's convinced her to go on this sailing trip, but she doesn't know it's got anything to do with drugs. She thinks it's just a holiday.

"She's actually very intelligent – a very strong, very confident character, but not ballsy or pushy. At the beginning, she's sort of lower key, but by the end I'm really going for it. She never gets too violent, but she's not your 'Ooh, ahh' girl, whimpering in the corner."

Linda started acting at the age of ten, was doing films for Disney at 11, and now lives in London. Recently, she's been doing British TV work like *Tears Before Bedtime* and episodes of *Press Gang*. "I used to commute between LA and London, but it has to be said I'm much happier in London," she says. "It's the people, the lifestyle – I hate LA pretentiousness, putting your lipstick on to go and buy your groceries."

Have you done anything like this before?

"No. It's my first action adventure and I love it! I do a bit of stage fighting, and I get some really great scenes. Today, in fact, I had a fantastic dramatic moment with the guy who's meant to be my boyfriend. And I don't have to wear any of the prosthetics either!"

Is there anything about the film that took you by surprise?

"I'll tell you, if I was speaking to someone and they said they were doing an action adventure, I'd say get in shape. Because you're standing around all day, and then they say, 'You've got to run, or fight, or do some sort of hugely energetic dramatic scene' and then you've got to do it again and again..."

PROTEUS IS BASED ON A BOOK BY Harry Adam Knight, a pseudonym for well known SF writer and journalist John Brosnan and another, anonymous writer. Brosnan himself has written the script, and Paul Brooks is a fan.

"I really like his style," he says. "I'm keen to make films of some of his other books too, as well as the sequel to this..."

One reason *Proteus* is being filmed so cheaply is that it's all being shot in one location: The exteriors, the interiors, *everything*...

"We've built a huge oil rig set in the lake out back," Paul tells me. "The decision was: Do we spend a fortune building a massive set, or do we go out on a real rig, with all the aggravation that could bring us? We decided that it wasn't worth the effort, and we'd build the rig right here. We've had a massive explosion, helicopters and God knows what else, and that could have caused major headaches at sea."

"Yes," agrees director Bob Keen. "The real challenge was to make a film that's set on an oil rig, and never leave East London."

NEXT UP IS DOUG "PINHEAD" BRADLEY, who plays Mr Brinkstone, the master criminal – once again in full prosthetic makeup. After all, the guy is meant to be around 95 years old!

"Mr Brinkstone's the one who set up the whole genetical engineering thing for entirely selfish purposes – specifically to try and avoid the Grim Reaper," laughs Doug. "He comes to the oil rig to find out why communications have broken down, and finds it apparently deserted, apart from this bunch of kids running around. It's a very brief appearance – no sooner do I arrive on the rig than I'm dead!"

So how come they didn't choose someone who's genuinely that old to do it?

"Well, there aren't that many actors in their 90s, are there? And I don't think John Gielgud would say yes to this! Also, with a fantasy movie, there's an unreal quality about using an actor wearing make-up that you just don't get from a real 90 year old. It sort of fits the mood of the film."

Being a villain, I take it you die horribly?

"Oh yes, it is rather good. I get got by my own creation – it's quite nasty actually. My mistake is that I think the genetic experimentation has gone desperately wrong – but the thing is, it's gone right, it's worked. There's just a bit of a design fault built in..."

"She's not your 'Ooh, ahh' girl whimpering in the corner." Toni Barry plays a lass with *very* bad taste in boyfriends.

I'M OUTSIDE EATING MY LUNCH FROM the chuck wagon when I notice this woman sitting just across from me on a raised warehouse entrance ramp. She's blonde and pretty, and wearing a towelling bathrobe. Underneath, you can see bits of bandage, as if she's just come out of a hospital. And, as it turned out, she had. We're chatting away about the food, when it suddenly dawns on me: You're in the film, aren't you?

"Yes, I play Craig's partner," she tells me. Well, of course she does. She's not dressed like this for fun. "I'm a DEA enforcement agent working undercover, and we're trying to bust these drug smugglers. We're involved with each other too, so that makes it all more interesting!"

So you're a good guy?

"I'm the *best* guy – well, not as good as Craig. He is, after all, the action hero."

I know she looks familiar, and briefly consider faking recognition in the hope her identity will be revealed naturally during the conversation. Happily, I decide against it.

"Look, where do I know you from?"

"Oh, loads of places. The thing people remember me most for was *Brookside*."

Of course! Jennifer Calvert, for it is she, played a Canadian character called Cheryl Boyanowsky in the Merseyside soap for a while, brought in to comfort a good-looking yuppie fella called Jonathan Gordon-Davies after his wife died from an electric shock. Or something. God, she used to look lovely in *Brookside*.

This must be quite different from life on the Close, I venture.

"It couldn't be more different! We film it much slower, I get to wear lots of prosthetic make-up – not that I'd want to make a habit of that, you understand – and there's loads of running around and shouting. I get some big scenes, including loads with the monster, where you're not sure if it's me or not. It's great."

A bit of a bonkers thought comes into my head, and I can't help saying it: "So, do you think Barry Grant would make a good action hero, or what?"

"Hmm, yeah, I think he would be." She thinks about it for a bit. "Actually, he'd be very good. He can play mean and he can be sensitive too. I think of all the actors in *Brookside* he'd be the best..."

Better than Ron Dixon, certainly.

"Or Sinbad!"

Ha ha!

"That'd be brilliant. You'd never expect him to survive to the end, so it'd be a real surprise!"

Jenny's filming a scene in the oil rig's hospital – hence the bandages – and runs off for her next shot. I wander away, bizarre images of Sinbad the window cleaner, tanned and shirt-free, battling a gigantic fish-monster to save the lovely Mandy playing in my mind.

THERE'S JUST ONE SUBJECT WE HAVEN'T mentioned so far – this shark/bloke monster thing. It sounds a bit odd, doesn't it? What I can't help thinking of is films like *Leviathan* and *Deep Star Six*, which have a lot in common with *Proteus*, and keep things ticking over fine until the monster actually appears. Then it's a laughable, rubbery mess. I have to ask Bob about this, although I know it's not the sort of question he's going to be happy about fielding.

So, Bob, how are you going to get over that little monster problem with *Proteus*?

"I'm not at all worried about that," he says flatly. "I'm a special effects guy. That's my game. If I can't make my monster work in my movie I might as well give up now. Let me just say, so there's no chance of confusion, 'Yes, the monster works.' No big surprise there.

"In fact, this monster is a designer's dream. We started off with the idea that it's shark-like, but with human overtones, and we went from there. The trick with something like this is not to use same technique too many times. For some bits we use a full-size shark model, then there's plenty of miniature work, and there are also some morphs. We've got masks, prosthetics, man-in-a-suit, mechanical things – and we just keep mixing them, so you never really know what the next look is going to be. You never give the audience the same thing twice, so they never quite get the gag.

"Anyway," he concludes "what's more important for this kind of film are the scare moments. We want to boo the audience. This is a big rollercoaster ride of a movie, with all the twists and turns you'd expect. We're going to scare the life out of you."

Proteus, now in post production, will be released theatrically in 1996.

Yes, we know that oil rig you've bumped into looks more inviting than your rubber raft, adrift on the open sea, but don't do it, mate, don't do it...

It's probably safe to say that this geezer isn't long for this world...

This guy, on the other hand, we're rather more hopeful about...

Craig Fairbrass earns his keep – and then some – in a spectacular leap from certain death towards, ah, certain death. Nice work if you can get it.

If you think we're showing you rather a lot of the shark monster in ***Proteus***, you don't know the half of it. Like the nasty beastie in *The Thing* – a definite influence here – this creature changes shape every five minutes or so...

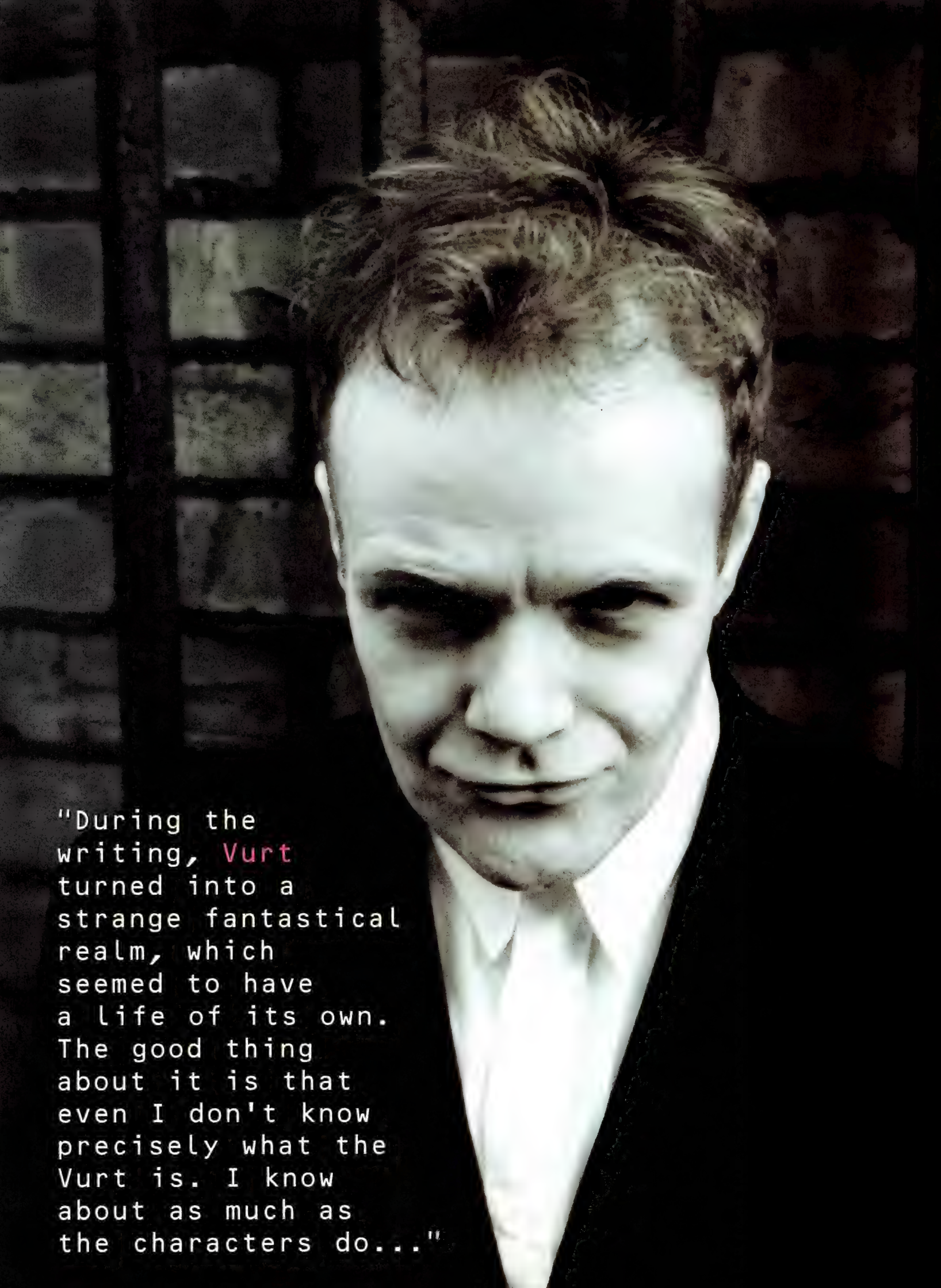
"I don't have to wear any prosthetics! I'm very fortunate like that," said Toni Barry, and from the look of this co-star we can see what she means...

Big problems for *Hellraiser* star Doug "Pinhead" Bradley...

...and *Brookie*'s Jennifer Calvert, who's going to have to learn to stop sleeping with her mouth open. You should see the pictures we didn't run...

"This is a horror-sci-fi-action pic, kind of like *Aliens* meets *The Thing* meets *Die Hard* meets *The Hidden*."

Paul Brooks, producer



"During the writing, Vurt turned into a strange fantastical realm, which seemed to have a life of its own. The good thing about it is that even I don't know precisely what the Vurt is. I know about as much as the characters do..."

SFX Profile

THE MAN WHO CONCEIVED VURT!

Millennium fever

PEOPLE SAY BRITISH WRITING'S BECOME STAGNANT. PEOPLE SAY REAL, IMAGINATIVE SCIENCE FICTION'S BEING SWAMPED BY TURGID FANTASY REWORKINGS. WE SAY: "RUBBISH! READ JEFF NOON!" **CATIE CARY** TRAVELS THE SURREAL STREETS OF HIS DRUG-STREWN FUTURE MANCHESTER, AND EXPLAINS WHY...

If, a couple of years ago, you'd been asked to name a city that lived as a character in a work of science fiction, the chances are you'd have picked somewhere like LA, New York or San Francisco – possibly even London. But I bet Manchester would never have even crossed your mind...

In 1993 that all changed. A new Manchester-based publishing house, Ringpull, debuted with a first novel by Mancunian Jeff Noon. It was called *Vurt*, and initial suspicions about its merits – much of it caused by a cheap 'n' cheerful-looking cover – were quickly dispelled by the novel itself, which managed to combine action with poetry, and sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll with a Thing-from-Outer-Space. And all that on the first page. It was set in a Manchester that lived and breathed as one of the main characters in the story, and the book's fame quickly spread.

Then, in 1994, *Vurt* won the Arthur C Clarke Award for the best science fiction novel of 1993, confounding pundits who'd expected to see an American walk it yet again.

And still it was only the beginning. A year or so later, and *Vurt's* fame has spread enormously. A mass-market paperback edition has just been printed, and Noon himself can regularly be found adorning some of the larger papers and style mags. He's recently had a second novel, *Pollen*, published, and finds himself regarded to some extent as the *enfant terrible* of British SF. It's not an image he's particularly comfortable with either.

"Nobody who saw me at the weekend in the garden would say that," he laughs. "I have very little to do with my characters, apart from emotionally. Sometimes I do readings, though, and people ask what drugs I take! But there's so little life in British fiction – I don't say science fiction; I refuse to see a

© Rob Scott

boundary – that if my stuff is seen as something new, then that's okay. The *enfant terrible* of British Letters would be okay."

Jeff tries to keep up with mainstream fiction, and has a large audience outside the SF genre. He tells me that many people who like *Vurt* have said they don't actually like science fiction. Partly, he suggests, this is down to a perception of SF shaped by Golden Age writers and films like *Star Wars*. The general public is ignorant of the progress made by such leading lights as JG Ballard and the New Wave writers – and, more recently, the cyberpunks – and hopes that the current renewal of interest in science fiction might help people "realise that SF is a powerful way to write about the present day, given the nature of the world we live in."

I tell him he's seen by many as a British William Gibson.

"It's said mostly by people who haven't read or understood the books," he sighs. "It's what you get when you're picked up by the Sunday supplements. I owe Gibson a debt for giving me the starting point, though. I'm happy to acknowledge that."

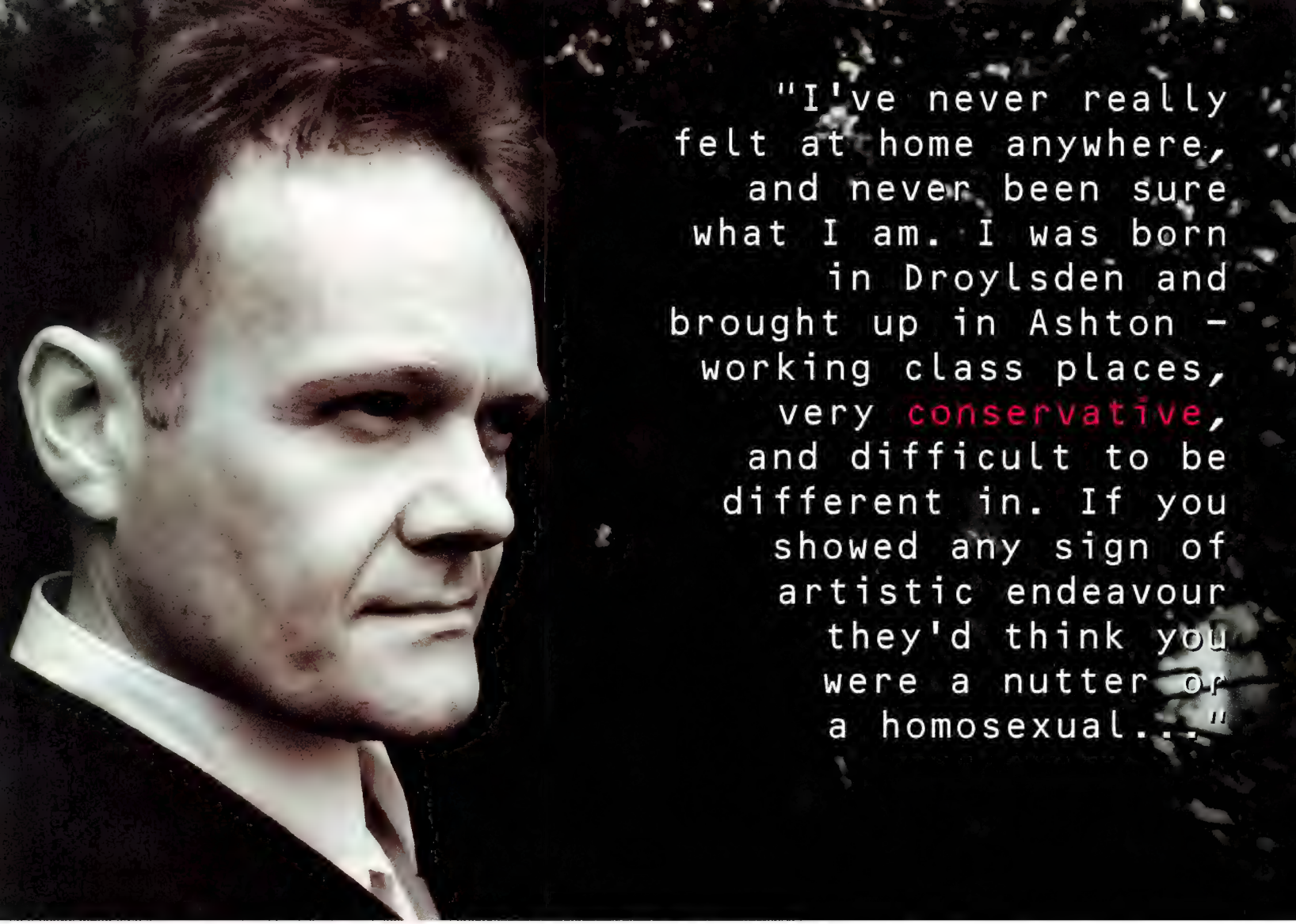
I'VE AGREED TO MEET JEFF IN A HOTEL restaurant in London's Docklands. It's all floral prints and willow, gentle murmurs fuelled by cake and tea rising above the omnipresent muzak, while the Thames laps sullenly against the glass wall. We're sitting in the shadow of Canary Wharf – the horizon is filled with concrete and steel. Noon's a compact man, quiet spoken but intense, and he chews questions over carefully before responding – often in a rush.

A few things swiftly emerge: He writes full time and tries to work every day. A session in the afternoon and another late at night, often until two or three in the morning, when he feels he does his best material. And he's enjoying his success...

"I love it," he smiles. "I don't want to boast too much, but I've been waiting a long time for this. I've written plays and I've played music, but now I'm glad I've found a medium through which I can really reach people. But it's a big surprise – Steve Powell from Ringpull kept saying to me: 'The book's going to break through, Jeff.' And I thought: 'No, it's not...'"

What? You thought it'd just be a cult thing, tucked away in the corner somewhere?

"Yeah, I thought it'd do all right in Manchester, but that's about it. But now it's being translated into Israeli and Japanese! I think the Japanese one's great, but what I'd


"I've never really felt at home anywhere, and never been sure what I am. I was born in Droylsden and brought up in Ashton – working class places, very conservative, and difficult to be different in. If you showed any sign of artistic endeavour they'd think you were a nutter or a homosexual..."

really like to see is the manga version. I'd love to see Scribble with those big eyes..."

Has there been any interest in doing *Vurt* in other mediums? What about a film?

"Well, there's been interest, although none of it's turned into anything solid. I'd love it though. Currently, I'm interested in doing *Vurt* as a play, and there's been interest in adapting it for radio too."

But perhaps it's best if, first, we get back to basics – *Vurt's* weird enough on its own, without dragging in Hollywood's real-world madness. So tell me about *Vurt*. Where exactly did this highly distinctive world come from?

"I'd started working on a play called *The Torture Garden,*" he tells me, "based on a novel by Octave Mirabeau, which was written back in 1899 – it's a little like De Sade, but not as vicious. Mirabeau was an anarchist, and he wanted to bring down the government. The book is about a prison, and in the centre of the prison is a fantastic garden where the ruling classes watch the prisoners being tortured for entertainment. It's a massive satire against the French ruling classes, and I was working out how to do it as a play when suddenly it came to me you could present it as if this torture garden was a virtual world for the well-to-do to visit. That's how it started...

"The thing is, I was writing the play, and halfway through it Steve Powell from Ringpull asked me to write a novel. So I suddenly switched to doing *Vurt,* which crept from my head packed full of ideas from the play.

"I'd never thought of writing a novel before. I just went home and started writing. It was a process of opening my mind and seeing what was in there – the exact opposite of what I used to do when writing plays, which were very carefully worked out. During the writing, *Vurt* turned into a strange fantastical realm, which seemed to have a life of its own. The good thing about it is that even I don't know precisely what the Vurt is. I've got lots more to explore, because I know about as much as the characters do. I knew as much as Scribble did when I was doing *Vurt,* which is very little. In *Pollen* I know a little more – but not *that* much more."

So *Pollen* isn't the end of your stories about the *Vurt* world. There's more?

"I'm writing four books which will describe the history of Vurt as it struggles towards independence from human reality. The next one starts off in London, and it's about somebody who comes to Manchester, when nobody goes to Manchester any more because nobody knows what's happening up there – they just know something crazy or bad is going on. But this character is forced to go there to sort this thing out, so it's from an outsider's point of view, which I'm interested in. The Vurt has given up trying to infiltrate reality; it's trying to become independent of reality instead. But if they succeed, this means human beings won't be able to dream at all.

"It's political. It's like a country or a planet wanting independence, but of course there are some individuals who don't want it. At the same time, the dogs are getting really pissed off being at the bottom of the pile. There's a general election coming up, and they've got an outsider's chance of getting this dog elected – of having a dog prime minister. So there are two opposite threats against pure human life."

Oh, didn't I tell you human/dog hybrids are some of the major characters in *Vurt?* I said it was strange...

One of the most striking images in the novels are the feathers, which transport people to a dreamland of their choice. Where did they come from?

"I wish I could tell you," Jeff shrugs. "It was a mundane thing rather than any great moment of imagination. I was thinking how the hell are the characters going to access this world? I wanted it to be something weird and powerful that would get everyone's attention, rather than pills, trips or the normal things, and I really thought I'd come up with something unique – until a friend of mine sent me an American Indian dreamcatcher as a present. It's a circle of bone with some twine and beads and then some ceremonial feathers hanging down. You put it above where you're sleeping at night, and it catches your dreams in the feathers. There I was, thinking the idea was totally unique, only to find it's been around for thousands of years..."

We talk briefly about the crossbreed characters in his books. People reconciling the different sides of their characters seems to be a major theme in both *Vurt* and *Pollen*...

"Yes. Coyote, for instance, is a guy who's totally at home with the animal side and the human side," he says. "He's the only character in both books who is, which makes him very

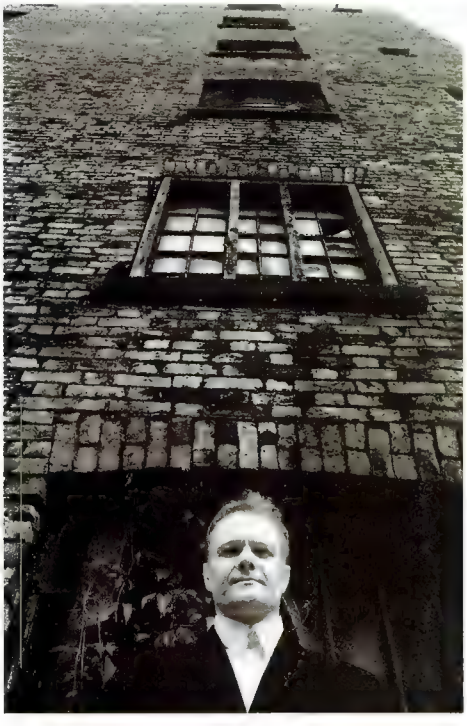
unusual. If you compare him to Clegg, who's also a Dogman, he's totally denied his dog side, which is what you call 'crossbreed loneliness.' He can't reconcile the two halves. The books are full of this complexity and fluidity. It's a very complex world that I write about. The people who survive are those who accept the complexity within them.

"It's interesting to me, because I've never really felt at home anywhere, and never been sure what I am. I was born in Droylsden and brought up in Ashton – working class places, very conservative, and difficult to be different in. If you showed any sign of artistic endeavour they'd think you were a nutter or a homosexual. I'm 37 now, and my dad must have been about that age when I was a kid, but he seemed to know exactly what he was. It all seems a bit nebulous nowadays.

"Even now I look around at people who're the same age as me, and some of them are so fixed. They seem so sure of who they are and what they're doing. I can't be like that, so I'm interested in characters who're struggling to find some kind of identity. I suppose the whole thing about the crossbreeds and the hybrids comes from that."

I DON'T KNOW MANCHESTER WELL, BUT you get an amazing feeling of what it's like from the books. I'm told by people who know the city that you can walk around all the places in *Vurt* and *Pollen* from them.

"Well, it's interesting, that," he says, "because I can't drive, but the characters in both books are rushing around all the time in



cop cars and things. I just got an A-Z and worked it out. But people who drive say, 'No, you wouldn't go that way,' and I say 'It's the shortest way,' and they say, 'No, not in reality.' Drivers have their own maps in their heads, which fascinates me – the idea that we all have our own view of the places we know.

"Most of the time I'm grasping at things, I don't fully understand them, and that's true about maps. With the books, I don't want people to say, 'Oh, that's what he means.' I'm forever trying to create in the reader's head the same slight confusion I feel."

The books are very modern, very *now*...

"I don't read a lot that's not 20th century," Jeff tells me. "Same with music. I'm into modern stuff – like the rhythms of modern jazz, for instance, but not classical music. I keep thinking about the beginning of the century, with Joyce and Picasso – it must have been a great time to be alive. Suddenly, you could create things in totally new ways – you didn't have to be realistic! You could reveal the human soul through pattern, through rhythm, dynamics and so on.

"I also think we're living in an interesting period now. Maybe it's just the century coming to an end, but we're starting to question ourselves – particularly in this country – much more than we used to. What is our job? What can we give to the world? We're constantly putting ourselves down – it's one of our failings – but I feel quite hopeful about things. I'm a real optimist. But people say to me, 'How could you write *Vurt*, it's such a bleak book.'"

I guess it's bleak physically, but it's not bleak culturally.

"It ties in with how *Vurt* works, doesn't it? It's set in the down and dirty mean streets of life, but it's easy within that to visit fantastic, pleasurable, dangerous realms. I think the juxtaposition of the two alleviates the bleakness. It's a great English tradition, isn't it? The other world, just beyond our own? CS Lewis and all that..."

Do you enjoy people like Lewis, then?

"Well, I read constantly as a kid," he says. "A lot of American comics and Jules Verne, and then that usual thing with puberty and science fiction – Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein. But I've never been obsessive about one particular kind of story. I read lots of things. I like to read American crime novels now – tough guy stories. James Lee Burke is an American crimewriter whose stories are set in New Orleans, and I've learnt a lot from him. He taught me you can combine an action story with lyricism and poetry.

"I read a lot of non-fiction as well. A lot of science. Sometimes you get the impression that scientists and mathematicians are more imaginative than artists these days. If you took 20 artists and locked them in a room for a week, I don't think they'd come up with anything as weird as fractals."

Do you suffer from hayfever? (Read the books and you'll understand why I asked...)

"No, I don't," he says, "but I used to when I was a kid. Really badly, but I became immune. Maybe it's because I don't mess around with grass any more.

"I wanted to examine what it would be like if you turned something trivial into something deadly. Because we talk so much about disease. There was a lull when we felt we'd become immune to everything; we'd beaten it. But now we're constantly worried about catching things. Especially AIDS. I don't want to make too much of that, but I wanted to do the opposite in *Pollen*... Take something harmless, like hayfever, an irritant – and turn it into a killer. But I don't set out to deliver a message. I just set out to surprise myself. And hope that someone else somewhere will be surprised as well..."

Dog-people, telepaths, and zombies

EXPLORING THE MANY DYNAMIC WORLDS OF VURT.

Jeff Noon has written two books exploring the Vurt world so far – *Vurt* and *Pollen* – and more are in the pipeline. They're set in a near-future Manchester, although how near into the future is never made clear, where much of the population is crossbred – human/dog hybrids, living/dead hybrids, robot/flesh hybrids, plus telepaths, cat-people (rare) and so on.

Quite how all this has happened isn't clear – it may be something to do with a drug called Fecundity 10, but then again it might not. (One of Noon's conceits is that you only know what the characters know.) Quite what the Vurt itself is is equally unclear. It might be a sort of virtual reality, it might be a drug-induced fantasy, it might be a "real" place, like Narnia. Look, just read the books, okay?

Vurt

Ringpull (1993); Pan (paperback) 1994

First-time *Vurt* riders should board here. Feathers come in different colours as transport to the dreamland of choice: Blue for safe legal dreams, Black for bootlegs, Pink for pornovurts, and Yellow for death.

Take a ride with the Stash Riders. They exist on Manchester's seamy underside, living on dripfeed and sharing wild dreams in illegal Vurt feathers. Desdemona was lost on their last trip, accidentally exchanged for the Thing-from-Outer-Space. Her brother/lover Scribble is desperate to find her, and drives a search for the dangerous English Voodoo – the doorway to the Yellow Feather realm where she was lost.

Vurt is a whirlwind hustle through exotic dreams and streetwise Manchester reality. You need to work a little to get into the feel of Noon's language, but once in, you'll be hooked on this cutting-edge, edge-of-your-seat thriller.

Pollen

Ringpull (1995)
Paperback due out in November

Coyote, maverick dogman cabbie, is courting Boadicea, hive-linked Manchester Xcab driver. She puts him in the way of a lucrative illegal fare, but when transporting his strange passenger, Coyote dies. Boda is suspected and hippy DJ Gumbo YaYa is on the case.

Mind-reading Shadowcop Sibyl Jones investigates the death, but the victim's mind is full of flowers. Meanwhile, the pollen count rises and the city is smothered in a strangling outgrowth of blossom.

Sir John Barleycorn has been searching for a way to infiltrate reality – in the shape of his wife Persephone – to give fulfilment and shape to the lives of Vurt beings; to enable them perhaps to die.

A brilliant examination of identity, and the ways and reasons why humans and dreams live and die.

Jeff Noon is currently working on a third Vurt novel, due out in '96 -'97. We can't wait...

WONDER WOMAN

1975-79

SHE HAD A MAGIC LASSO, AN INVISIBLE PLANE AND WORE THE MOST RIDICULOUS COSTUME IN SUPERHERODOM. HOW COULD YOU FAIL TO LOVE DIANA PRINCE, ASKS **JON ABBOTT**.

"At last, in a world torn by the hatreds and wars of men, appears a woman to whom the problems and feats of men are mere child's play... With a hundred times the agility and strength of our best male athletes and strongest wrestlers, she appears as though from nowhere to avenge an injustice or right a wrong. As lovely as Aphrodite, as wise as Athena, with the speed of Mercury and the strength of Hercules, she is known only as... Wonder Woman!"

With these stirring words, America's first comic-book heroine was born, courtesy of editor Max Gaines, illustrator Harry Peter and creator Charles Moulton, in *All-Star Comics* #8 (December 1941). A starring feature in *Sensation Comics* #1 (January 1942) swiftly followed, but – incredibly – mainstream success didn't come until the '70s, when the famous TV show, after several false starts, eventually made it to the TV screen.

Both the comics and the television series played loose with Greek mythology, coming up with a race of Amazon superwomen living on an uncharted Caribbean island to explain away the existence of Wonder Woman. She's actually the immortal Amazon Diana, who leaves her home on Paradise Island to assist humanity in the fight against the Nazis. Her inspiration? Lieutenant Steve Trevor, an American airman who crashes into the sea nearby, and with whom she falls madly in love. Once in the mortal world, she takes on the identity of military secretary Diana Prince, and remains in the US to fight the war (and later every threat imaginable) at Steve's side. Her crime-fighting kit includes an invisible aeroplane, a magic lariat that compels people to tell the truth, and bullet-repelling bracelets.

1975, and dads across the nation dreamed they were this guy, struggling manfully with the pneumatic Carter.

The history of the *Wonder Woman* series on both sides of the Atlantic is, however, rather convoluted. Her first TV appearance was as a member of *Super-Friends*, a 1973-75 animated series based on the *Justice League Of America* comics, where she was voiced by Shannon Farnon. Later in '73 came the first live action version, with a disastrous *Wonder Woman* TV movie starring Cathy Lee Crosby. Ricardo Montalban (star of *Fantasy Island* and, of course, *Star Trek's* Khan) was the villain, with stocky Kaz Garas as Steve Trevor. The second *Wonder Woman* pilot – oddly titled *The New Original Wonder Woman* – was vastly superior, and commendably true to the strip's mythology. It boasted a script by former *Batman* scribe Stanley Ralph Ross,

Cathy Lee Crosby as a track-suited Wonder Woman in the first dreadful TV movie. Unsurprisingly, it was a disaster.

splendid direction by SF veteran Leonard *(The Outer Limits)* Horn, and a marvellous cast, including Cloris Leachman (camping it up as Queen Hypolyte), Kenneth Mars (recreating his loony Nazi from Brooks' *The Producers),* Stella Stevens (as a sexy spy), Eric Braeden and Red Buttons, all of whom understood the show's camp style perfectly.

Still blundering around in confusion and indecision, the ABC network ordered only a couple of specials – "Wonder Woman Meets Baroness Van Gunther" and "Fausta, The Nazi Wonder Woman," – and a short run of episodes, which tried to capture the spirit of the original. However, the big break came in 1976 when Lindsay Wagner was injured, thus holding up production on *The Bionic Woman. Wonder Woman* then became the obvious substitute for the remainder of the season.

Or so you'd think. In fact, Warners was by now so annoyed with ABC's inability to give a firm commitment to the series that it approached CBS with the show, who took it on with the stipulation that the time period be moved up from the '40s to the '70s – the then-present. As the comics themselves had moved with the times, this wasn't such a bad move, although it did remove some of the period charm, replacing the zanier '40s milieu with blander adventure scenarios.

Of course, Diana is an immortal – but how do you explain Steve Trevor looking the same in the '70s as he did during World War II? The answer was simple – Diana Prince now worked alongside Steve Trevor's son, who, coincidentally, was a dead ringer for dad, and even had the same name! The two worked for a Washington-based secret agency called the International Agency Defence Command. There was even a cute computer thrown into the mix, a mouthy piece of machinery named IRAC.

In Britain, *Wonder Woman's* history is just as checkered. The BBC bought it in one of its periodic bids to out-ITV ITV, but then quickly lost its nerve and did its best to bury the show, dumping it out in mid-Summer. This didn't prevent it becoming a huge kiddie hit, however, with plenty of dads also tuning in to ogle over Carter.

Although *Time Out* implied that the first season had been bought and shelved (this remains unconfirmed), the BBC initially aired only the modern-day episodes, avoiding all references to the WW II scenario. Some time later, though, the excellent WW II-based pilot by Ross and Horn was to turn up on ITV as part of a TV movie package – and eventually the whole of the series, including the WW II stuff, was broadcast by Sky One, which had inherited the show from BSB.

Do you remember the name of the episode...

...in which Diana discovers a group of Nazis plotting to clone Hitler?

Answer at the bottom of the page

Fact File

Regular cast

Diana Prince/Wonder Woman: **Lynda Carter**
Lt. Steve Trevor: **Lyle Waggoner**

Recurring cast

General Blankenship: **Richard Eastham**
Yeoman Etta Candy: **Beatrice Colen**
Joe Atkinson: **Normann Burton**
Drusilla/Wonder Girl: **Debra Winger**

Executive Producer: **Douglas Cramer**
Producer: **Bruce Lansbury**
Developed for television by **Stanley Ralph Ross** from an original character by **Charles Moulton**
Music: **Artie Kane, Charles Fox**

Total number of episodes: **59 and two pilots**
Pilot episode airdate: **7 November 1975**
Official series start: **21 April 1976**
First UK airdate: **1 July 1978**
Last original episode aired: **11 September 1979**

UK broadcast history: BBC 1 (second and third seasons only), ITV (first two pilots), Sky One (entire series).

Guest stars of interest: Kurt Kasznar *(Land Of The Giants),* David Hedison *(Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea),* Ted Shackleford *(Space Precinct),* Frank Gorshin *(Batman),* and Rene Auberjonois *(Deep Space Nine).*

Who's who?

Lynda Carter was already famous as a former Miss USA and Miss World when she secured the role of Wonder Woman, and it was good casting – she was a dead ringer for Charles Moulton's original character, and approached her role with admirable enthusiasm. No great performance was required, and none was given. Carter simply had to look good and be amiable, and she handled it with style. Unlike the pug-faced Hulk and wrinkly Spider-Man, Carter looked striking and authentic in her ludicrous outfit too. With veteran stuntwoman Jeannie Epper providing the action, the most effort demanded of Carter was a toothy grin at the end of each episode.

Lyle Waggoner, once shortlisted for the role of *Batman* in the '60s TV series, looked like a model and gameshow host rolled into one – and he was. Well known for TV variety shows, and with a history of trash TV and film behind him, he treated his role as himbo Steve Trevor with tongue firmly in cheek: "I was really good at being unconscious," he remembers. "I think hitting my head on a rubber rock was half my job."

Handsome but useless, Lyle Waggoner's Steve Trevor was effectively a male Lois Lane, forever needing to be rescued.

Where are they now?

Post-*Wonder Woman,* Lynda Carter starred in the short-lived detective series *Partners In Crime* (aka *50/50)* with Loni Anderson – sometimes shown off-peak on ITV – and is currently co-starring with Lee Horsley in the series *Hawkeye,* shown on Sky One, in which she plays pioneer Elizabeth Shields.

Lyle Waggoner is still active in the theatre, turns up occasionally in guest-starring roles on TV, and looks back on *Wonder Woman* with affection. He has, however, no desire to do another regular TV series.

Wonder Girl Debra Winger – a semi-regular on the show, and Diana's kid sister – became a film star, of course, and also has fond memories of the show. Apparently, she once made an appearance running around the set of *The David Letterman Show* in her Wonder Girl costume!

A few things you probably didn't know about...

Wonder Woman

- Lyle Waggoner's earliest screen roles include a bit-part as an android in *Lost In Space,* and a role in the SF B-movie *The Time Travellers.*
- All sorts of well known SF TV writers contributed to the *Wonder Woman* scripts, including *Star Trek* scribes Dorothy Fontana and Margaret Armen, *Buck Rogers* writers Anne Collins and Alan Brennert, and former *Bewitched* scriptwriters (and later *Cagney and Lacey* creators) Barbara Avedon and Barbara Corday.
- In true Hollywood fashion, while dozens of girls were auditioning for the part of Wonder Woman, Lynda Carter was spotted while screen-testing for something else...

Answer: "Anschluss '77"

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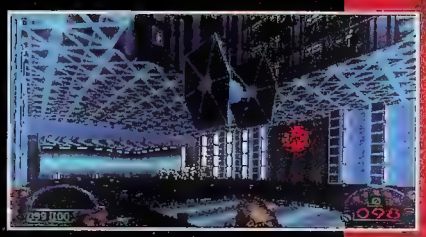
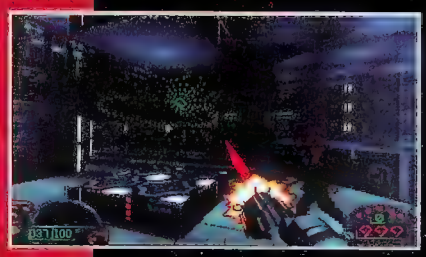
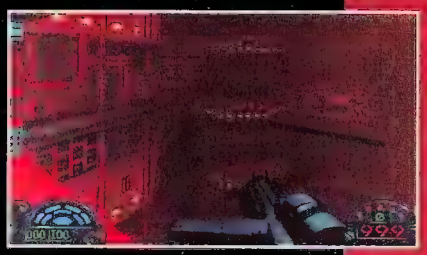
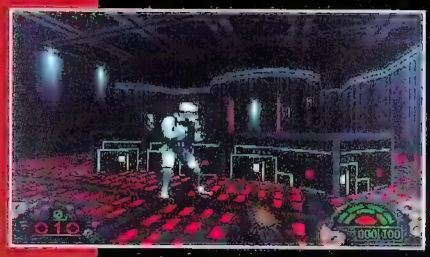
STAR WARS DARK FORCES





CAN YOU SMELL THE
FOUL STENCH
OF EVIL?
CAN YOU LOOK DEATH AND
DISTRESS IN THE FACE?
ARE YOU READY TO FACE
THE DARK SIDE ?





FIRST
PERSON
FIRE
POWER
IN THE
STAR WARS
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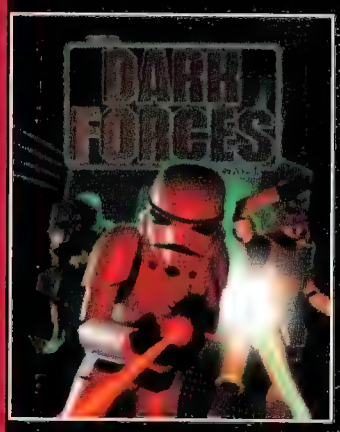

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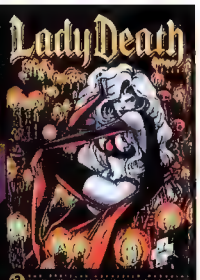

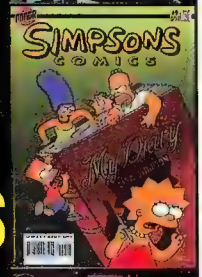

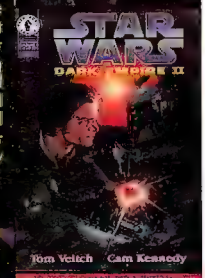

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Welcome to the SFX Review Guide, 26 pages packed with our thoughts on the latest films, TV shows, videos, books, computer games and, well, all sorts really...

REVIEWS

From Casper to The Outer Limits, we say what we mean and mean what we say...

Ratings? They're *so* simple they don't need an explanation!

That said, we're going to give you one anyway. That's how good we are. Y'see, everything in SFX gets rated by that old school system of As, Bs and Cs. For a full breakdown of what they all mean, just follow this month's comparative rating scale, supplied by SFX staff writer MJ "Simo" Simpson (to whom all complaints should be sent).

A+ *2001's* Discovery: The best thing ever!

A *Alien's* Nostromo: Excellent!

A- *Star Trek's* Enterprise: Very good, but slightly flawed...

B+ *Star Wars'* Millennium Falcon: Good and groovy!

B *Forbidden Planet's* J-57D: Perfectly reasonable...

B- *Dr Who's* Tardis: Good for what it is...

C+ *Lost in Space's* Jupiter 2: Not quite there...

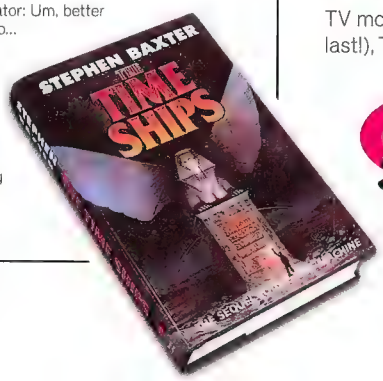
C *Red Dwarf's* Starbug: Could do so much better...

C- *Battlestar Galactica's* Viper: Not much cop at all...

D+ *Blake's 7's* Liberator: Um, better than the Scorpio...

D *The Black Hole's* Palamino: Dreadful!

D- A silver-painted paper plate hung from a piece of fishing twine. 'Nuff said.



FILM Reviews — PAGE 74
Ghostly sfx spectacular *Casper,* John Carpenter's psychological horror *In the Mouth of Madness,* the ultra-gory *Demon Knight*, plus The Month in Film, SF Box Office Charts and more.

TV Reviews — PAGE 78
What's this new *The Outer Limits* show like, then? Plus reviews of "Wild Palms in Space" *White Dwarf,* Sky's *Highlander* (the series), *Babylon 5* and more. Oh, and The Month in TV, of course.

VIDEO Reviews — PAGE 82
The *Star Trek: Voyager* pilot, plus the works of Ed Wood, *Stargate,* the new *Alien Nation: Dark Horizon* TV movie, *Casino Royale, Buckaroo Banzai* (at last!), The Month in Video and more.

BOOK Reviews — PAGE 90
Stephen Baxter's amazing sequel to HG Wells' *The Time Machine, The Time Ships,* the new *Red Dwarf* novel *Last Human,* The Month in Books and more.

COMIC Reviews — PAGE 96
Dark Empire 2 leads a slurry of *Star Wars* titles, including *Droids, Jabba the Hutt* and classic *Star Wars* graphic novels, plus *Tales of the Marvels: Blockbuster,* the latest *The Incredible Hulk* and the new *Tank Girl* series in The Month in Comics, Charts and more.

MEDIA Reviews — PAGE 98
A Final Unity, the new PC *Star Trek: The Next Generation* game, plus the fabulous-looking *Prisoner of Ice,* and Acclaim's new Super NES/Mega Drive incarnation of *Judge Dredd.*

MODEL Reviews — PAGE 100
AMT/Ertl's beautiful "gold tone" X-Wing, plus new *Star Trek* Mini Ships, action figures, a lovely life-size phaser and loads more besides.

TOSH Reviews — PAGE 102
Doctor Who talking books (watch out for Pertwee's Daleks!), plus our fave crap action figure, suck on *Power Rangers* Spin Pop Candy, and more...

"Considering the amount of time and effort spent on the ghosts, it's rather ironic that the real-world gags get all the best laughs. Next to these, the spooks just can't compete."

CASPER

He's billed as "the friendly ghost." And it seems he's here to stay, for good or ill

Studio: **Amblin/Universal**
Director: **Brad Silberling**
Starring: **Christina Ricci, Bill Pullman, Cathy Moriarty, Eric Idle**
Cert: **PG**
Running time: **100 mins**
Release: **Now showing**

Text: **Matt Bielby**

Imagine the various scenes between Ariel and Flounder in Disney's *The Little Mermaid* writ large for one hour 40 minutes and you should have a pretty good idea what *Casper's* like. If that appeals, maybe you'll like the film...

Casper is, of course, "the friendly ghost" – although that's probably about as much as most

"G-g-ghost!" Ricci and dad meet the houseguest.

But he's just so *friendly!* Casper's an undeniably pally spook, and an sfx triumph.

Hang on, you're meant to be a friendly ghost, but not that friendly! Casper snuggles up to Ricci, and a love that dare not speak its name is born...

Brits know about him. The character actually started out in a number of cartoon shorts in the '50s, but really became more famous by later appearing in Harvey comics, and – bizarrely enough – as the United Nations Children's Ambassador in the '60s. Now, after years "resting," he's making his big screen comeback, and looks set to spawn a new cartoon series, possible sequels and merchandise galore.

What we've got here is very much a children's adventure/comedy, but loaded with enough sly adult jokes (most of them based on other movies) to keep adults awake for the duration. It also has – reputedly – more special effects shots than any other film, and I can believe it. With four of the main characters being cartoon ghosts, and the rest yer actual, living humans, it's almost inevitable that effects will feature in almost every scene, and very impressive it all is too – much of the interaction being good enough to put even the likes of ex-champ *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* into the shade. What it lacks, unfortunately, is the clever, inventive script that *Roger* had. Plainly put, this is likeable and beautifully done, but not very funny.

The set-up goes like this: Carrington Crittenden (Cathy Moriarty), a sort of human Cruella de Vil, inherits the crumbling Whipstaff Manor, located in the gloriously picturesque Friendship, Maine, and rushes off with her bumbling helper (Eric Idle) to dig up the treasure they've learned is hidden there. Only trouble is, it's haunted – by Casper, a lonely little boy ghost who just wants to make friends, and Stretch, Stinkie and Fatso, his three mean uncle ghosts, who spend most of their time chasing people away.

Enter bumbling freelance "ghost therapist" Dr James Harvey and teenage daughter Kat (Pullman and Ricci), hired by Moriarty to get rid of the ghosts, and who soon move into the mansion with the aim of "easing these troubled spirits into the afterlife." Ricci quickly makes friends with Casper, dad gets into a series of running battles with Stretch, Stinkie and Fatso, and Moriarty and Idle bumble about in the background.

Interestingly enough, considering the amount of time and effort spent on the ghosts, it's the real-world gags that get all the best laughs – two involving a Range Rover particularly tickled me, while the oldest joke in the book (shoelaces tied together, would you believe?) brought the house down. Next to these, the spooks just can't compete. Casper is a drip, while the three nasty uncles – obviously meant to provide the comic highpoints of the film – fall flat. Sure, they're impressive visual creations, but they get few good lines, and – to compensate – tend to shout a lot, a sure sign of desperation. The movie pastiches which litter the film – *Ghostbusters* and *Apocalypse Now* among them – smack of self-indulgence too.

Still, there are compensations. The leads acquit themselves well, although it's tragic having to watch Christina Ricci – so brilliant as the poker-faced Wednesday in *The Addams Family* – as just "your typical American teenager," and the effects, a seamless blend of live action and cartoon, are never less than excellent. Fans of sfx for their own sake will certainly love the look of *Casper*. It's just a pity they haven't been used to enliven a genuinely amusing story... 😐

IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

Studio: **New Line International**
Director: **John Carpenter**
Starring: **Sam Neill, Jurgen Prochnow, Julie Carmen**
Cert: **15**
Running time: **95 mins**
Release: **Now showing**

Text: **Dave Golder**

"Reality ain't what it used to be," moans an old-timer in John Carpenter's latest gore-fest. Then he blows his brains out. Why? Because that's what it says in the script. And I'm not being facetious. Honest. Y'see, that's what the film's all about – just who's in control of our lives?

Sure, it sounds pretentious, and there's more than a touch of *The Naked Lunch* about *In the Mouth of Madness*. But unlike Cronenberg, Carpenter has escaped most of the obvious traps here and crafted an intriguingly off-beat shocker that steers well clear of pompous metaphysical musings. It's kind of like *Jacob's Ladder* meets *Hellraiser*, but better than both.

When top horror writer Sutter Cane goes missing just days before he's about to hand in the manuscript for his latest novel, *In the Mouth of Madness*, his publisher Jackson Harglow (Charlton Heston) calls in insurance investigator John Trent (Sam Neill). Trent believes the whole thing to be a publicity stunt until his investigation leads him and Cane's editor (Julie Carmen) to a New England town that should only exist in Cane's novels, and things start to get very weird indeed...

From the opening sanatorium sequence to the final, almost Brechtian twist ending, *In the Mouth of Madness* is a constantly riveting blend of gore, shocks, black humour and stylish direction. The refreshingly intelligent script is streets ahead of your average horror flick, while the blood and guts quotient is high enough to keep even the splatter junkie happy.

But it's not perfect. The main problem is that Sam Neill's blinkered character gets more than a tad irritating after a while – you'd expect him to re-assess his cynical "it's all part of a publicity stunt" attitude rather more quickly than he does, particularly after he's seen the woman he's just snogged grow tentacles. Also unimpressive is Jurgen Prochnow, whose Cane is disappointingly devoid of menace, while Heston is there, seemingly, just to have his name on the credits. A couple of dodgy, sub-*Nightbreed* monster effects almost ruin a couple of scenes too.

Perhaps the best thing about *In the Mouth of Madness* is the way – in these days of vomit-inducingly realistic make-up effects – it gets back to the true meaning of horror by coming up with a scenario that is, in itself, truly terrifying. See it with some mates – you'll be arguing about it down the pub for hours. 😐

Sam Neill finds a new way to study the small print in his contract.

Julie Carmen and plant.

Just when things couldn't get any worse, they pipe The Carpenters into your cell.

Don't you hate it when people try to read over your shoulder? Especially when their faces are peeling, and they drop bits of rotting flesh all over that freshly-ironed shirt.

Sam Neill and Julie Carmen not really enjoying themselves – it's just a job, you know.

ED WOOD

Studio: **Touchstone Pictures**
Director: **Tim Burton**
Starring **Johnny Depp, Martin Landau, Sarah Jessica Parker, Patricia Arquette**
Cert: **15**
Running time: **127 mins**
Release: **Now showing**

Text: **MJ Simpson**

When *Ed Wood* opened several months ago in the USA, the critics raved over it – and the public stayed away in droves. In many places, it closed after running for only a couple of weeks. Since then, it's won two Oscars...

This is not your ordinary biopic. Then again, Ed Wood was not your ordinary director. Burton's latest *opus* covers the man's life from his disastrous stage play *The Casual Company*, through his meeting with Bela Lugosi, the production of *Glen or Glenda* and *Bride of the Monster*, through Lugosi's rehab and subsequent death, right up to the creation of *Plan Nine from Outer Space* (if you're not *au fait* with Mr Wood or his work, check out The Ed Wood Story in Strange Tales, starting on page 6). The final two sequences are the only fictional scenes in the entire film: A chance meeting with Orson Welles and a "successful" première of *Plan Nine*. (In reality, things didn't go quite so well...)

Burton's distinctive directorial style suits Wood's bizarre life-story perfectly, with its black and white cinematography, unusual camera angles, and profusion of tracking shots. Johnny Depp is terrific as Wood, and Oscar-winner Martin Landau is uncanny as Bela Lugosi (in Oscar-winning make-up by Rick Baker). The rest of the cast are also excellent – watch out for the real Conrad Brooks (played in the film by Brent Hinkley) in a cameo as a barman. But superb as this film undoubtedly is, it was unrealistic of Touchstone Pictures to expect anything more than a cult hit. This is a quirky, off-beat movie, directed by a chap who's famous for quirky, off-beat movies, and it's all about a guy whose one great passion was – quirky, off-beat movies! If you like your cinema mainstream or trendy, well, you could hate this.

Bill Murray slaps on the vaseline.

Vampira: Slimmer of the year.

It's spookily uncanny how convincing Burton's restaging of scenes from Wood's movies – such as this one from *Glen or Glenda* – can be.

Martin Landau must be the first ever person to win an Oscar for a role which involves splashing around in a pond fighting a large and unconvincing plastic shark.

Ed Wood is definitely a fan's film. To appreciate Burton's movie, you have to sympathise with Wood and admire his pathetic opus. It was passion that kept Wood going, and that's at the heart of the story. Anybody who's passionate about B-movies will love it, as will those who care passionately about SF, Tim Burton, Johnny Depp, transvestism or just movies in general.

It's a wonderful, funny, sad, warm and hugely enjoyable film. There's the sadness of Ed losing his girlfriend Dolores Fuller, and the joy of his new relationship with Kathy O'Hara. There's the happiness of his growing friendship with Lugosi, the pathos of the once-great Bela's drug addiction, and the tragedy of his death. Above all, there's the eternal optimism of Wood and his gradually increasing group of associates.

Only Ed Wood could have made a film like *Plan Nine from Outer Space*, and only Tim Burton could have made a film like *Ed Wood*. Thoroughly recommended.

A+

TALES FROM THE CRYPT PRESENTS DEMON KNIGHT

Studio: **Universal**
Director: **Ernest Dickerson**
Starring: **Billy Zane, William Sadler, Jada Pinkett**
Cert: **18**
Running time: **93 mins**
Release: **Now showing**

Text: **Dave Golder**

If you're the sort of person who fast-forwards through the talky bits in *Platoon* to get to the parts where people get their limbs blown off, then *Demon Knight* is your kind of film. It's virtually gross-out after gross-out – and we're talking major-league, 20-pints-of-blood-a-go gross-outs here.

The whole concept's actually pretty bizarre. It's based on the US anthology TV series *Tales from the Crypt*, which in turn was based on the '50s comic book of the same name. Both comic book and TV series are presented by a dubious character called the Crypt Keeper, a walking corpse with a terrible line in puns.

The wheeze is that the Crypt Keeper wants to get into the movies, and *Demon Knight* is the result. It's planned as the first in a series of films which'll take full advantage of the relative freedom the big screen format allows – namely the licence to throw around more blood than you get in an entire series of *ER*, courtesy of the 18 certificate. Be warned though: If you're expecting something more than an extra-gory TV movie, look elsewhere. The majority of the action takes place in one (on-set) location, there's a small core of main actors, and the plot – which would have been stretched to fill an episode of *The Outer Limits* – is always at breaking point.

He's just not good in the mornings.

Billy Zane – he's after your soul...

Remember to eat your carrots.

Star of the film is Billy Zane, a charismatic demon who collects souls. He also wants an ancient artefact that's in the possession of mysterious bloke named Brayker (William Sadler). When Sadler takes refuge in a boarding house,

Pinkett is made out to be some kind of Ripley-esque heroine, but you never really care if she lives or dies.

Regulars from the *Tales from the Crypt* TV series, like William Sadler, get the main roles in the film.

Zane unleashes a host of demons to besiege the place and reclaim the artefact. It's now up to Brayker to defend the boarding house and its residents from meeting a diabolical end.

Not that he does a very good job, naturally enough. Most of the "fun" comes from seeing the motley bunch of residents get sliced, shot, consumed, mashed and generally pulped into bloody messes as a result of Brayker's blunders. None of it makes much sense, and the explanations are deliberately ludicrous – "I don't make up the rules," claims Brayker. Then again, why bother with logic when you can claim the whole thing is a send-up? Seems the easy way out.

But while there are some genuinely amusing moments here – most of the humour is so sick it needs a life support system – the film rarely shocks. Rather, it opts for stomach-churning detail every time and ends up looking like some half-baked *Evil Dead 2* rip-off. It does the business if you're into gore effects, and it rattles along at a fair pace, but it's not half as witty as it likes to think it is.

C+

© Rian Hughes

The month in FILM

WHERE WE PROVIDE QUICK UPDATE REVIEWS OF OLD FILMS STILL DOING THE ROUNDS, DATES FOR NEW MOVIES OPENING DURING JULY AND AUGUST, AND RUN THIS MONTH'S BOX OFFICE CHARTS.

Still playing

THE MANGLER

Guild

Director: **Tobe Hooper**
Starring: **Robert Englund, Ted Levine**
Cert: **18**
Running time: **106 mins**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

A natural for home video, and okay as a "you can hold my hand if you're scared" date movie, *The Mangler* is yet another Stephen King adaptation (this one from a fairly obscure 1972 short story) that looks doomed to obscurity. Ted Levine is the bitter, unlikeable cop hero, Robert Englund is the loathsome New England laundry owner, and "the mangler" is a giant Victorian industrial mangle – far too big for the simple task of pressing sheets – that dominates Englund's Dickensian workplace.

Of course, people keep getting their hands trapped in – and even pulled right through – this pressing machine, so gruesome, blood-splattered scenes provide the film's chief highlights. Certainly, Levine's grumbling is uninteresting, and the town-that-sold-its-soul-to-the-devil conspiracy he uncovers fairly predictable, although Englund's over-the-top performance, and the climactic scenes where (I kid you not) the mangle comes to life do provide enough chuckles and shocks to make this a not-completely-worthless cinematic experience.

Oh, and it was shot in South Africa, apparently, which explains why it doesn't look like any New England I ever went to.

C

STREET FIGHTER

Columbia TriStar

Director: **Steven E de Souza**
Starring: **Jean Claude Van Damme, Raul Julia, Kylie Minogue**
Cert: **12**
Running time: **100 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

My advice is simple: Don't, under any circumstances, see this film. Please. Don't even think about it. When various magazines, newspapers and TV programmes are drawing up their the Top 10 worst films of the year this Christmas, you can bet *Street Fighter* will be in every one.

Based on the beat-'em-up video arcade game of the same name, *Street Fighter* fails on every level. The acting, special effects, direction, make-up and sets are all embarrassingly amateurish, while the plot is just laughable.

Even fans of the video game are going to be disappointed. For a start, there's hardly any fighting, and when there is, it's so badly staged it lacks any excitement. And the characters, for want of a less noble word, bear little resemblance to their more animated computer counterparts.

Completely risible.

D-

OUTBREAK

Warner Bros.

Director: **Wolfgang Petersen**
Starring: **Dustin Hoffman, Morgan Freeman, Donald Sutherland**
Cert: **15**
Running time: **127 mins**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

A big, highly topical hit on both sides of the Atlantic, Petersen's fast-moving, well structured and nicely played deadly-virus-on-the-loose thriller should be top of the must-see list for any SFX reader who hasn't actually got round to catching it yet. Sure, this is only borderline science fiction, but it's definitely the sort of stuff SF fans will like, boasting some bravura film-making, a big, sweeping plot, and (yes!) a monster for the good guys (chiefly army doctor Hoffman) to fight, albeit one you can't actually see.

The plot? Well, it's kind of like the beginning of '70s TV show *The Survivors*, or Stephen King's *The Stand*, as a deadly, rapidly mutating virus relocates itself from the middle of an African jungle to small-town America, with devastating results. Things get slightly too "adventurish" at the end, perhaps – with Hoffman racing against time to save the remaining population before mad general Sutherland firebombs the stricken town out of existence – but it's a well-made and exceedingly well-timed film, and well worth a couple of hours of your time.

A-

TANK GIRL

UIP

Director: **Rachel Talalay**
Starring: **Lori Petty, Malcolm McDowell, Ice-T**
Cert: **18**
Running time: **104 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Don't believe the anti-hype. Okay, *Tank Girl* is far from perfect, and if you're a devoted fan of the comic, you'll probably loathe it, but it's certainly not the disaster many lemming-like film critics have been saying.

Sure, the plot is virtually non-existent and horrendously disjointed (you can tell there's been some last minute re-editing), but at least it vaguely makes sense, which is more than you can say about *Stargate* or *Generations*. And it's little more than an excuse to string together a series of increasingly bizarre action set pieces anyway, so what's the problem?

Lori Petty's Tank Girl is more Animaniacs than *Deadline*, but her vacuous valley girl act is enjoyable, and the rest of the cast, particularly Ice T as a mutant kangaroo, put in more effort than the script really deserves. Mix in some impressive action set pieces, a nice line in sick humour, plus a Busby Berkeley song and dance routine, and you end up with a film that's as much bizarrely entertaining as it is excruciating.

C+

The Mangler: They're never going to get bloodstains like that out...

Street Fighter: The future looks bleak for Kylie and Jean-Claude.

Outbreak: Those costumes in the London Marathon just get sillier.

Tank Girl: Lori contemplates murdering a few film critics.

Coming soon

Congo — **30 June**
From Frank Marshall, the director who brought us super-intelligent spiders in *Arachnophobia*, a film about super-intelligent apes. What next? Super-intelligent armadillos?

Batman Forever — **14 July**
Apparently over 70 sets were built to bring this latest chapter of the Bat saga to the big screen. That compares to seven in the previous film. Then again, they were seven really *big* sets...

Judge Dredd — **21 July**
A mere week after the Dark Knight stalks the streets for a third time, Dredd is unleashed. Is this wise? Will audiences be in a super-anti-hero mood by this time, or will Kilmer KO Stallone?

Power Rangers — **21 July**
No cheap footage from Japanese kids programmes here. It's all new monsters for the Rainbow Warriors' first foray onto the big screen. Go go, Power Rangers!

Waterworld — **11 August**
First, industry insiders predict this expensive waterlogged *Mad Max* rip-off will be a turkey. Now others sheepishly admit it's not as bad as the doomsayers would have us believe, although the producers have snatched editing duties from director Kevin Reynolds...

SF Movie Box Office

Outbreak Spreads!

For the second month running, the Wolfgang Petersen-directed, Dustin Hoffman-starring viral thriller ***Outbreak*** is the most successful SF film doing the rounds. In May, it took more at the global box office than the other nine films listed here put together!

John Carpenter's remake of ***Village of the Damned*** made a strong enough initial showing in the USA to hit second place, with French fantasy ***The City of Lost Children*** and ***Johnny Mnemonic*** (still only released in Japan over this period, where it's been retitled *JM*) also doing well.

Although it's pretty much disappeared elsewhere, ***The Mask*** continues to be popular in Italy, where they presumably watch it for Jim Carrey's fashion tips.

The SFXclusive Worldwide Top Ten SF Films

1 **Outbreak** (US) Warner Bros.
2 **Village of the Damned** (US) Universal
3 **Street Fighter** (US) Columbia Tristar
4 **Stargate** (US) Guild
5 **Johnny Mnemonic** (US) 20th Century Fox
6 **In the Mouth of Madness** (US) Entertainment In Film
7 **The Mask** (US) New Line
8 **The City of Lost Children** (France) Lumiere
9 **Star Trek: Generations** (US) Paramount
10 **Wes Craven's New Nightmare** (US) Medusa

"The BBC decided not to show the US pilot episode first, so instead we were treated to the dismal 'Blood Brothers,' which offers only a hint of terror and, most importantly, no monster..."

THE OUTER LIMITS

It caused nightmares in the '60s – will it do the same for viewers in the '90s?

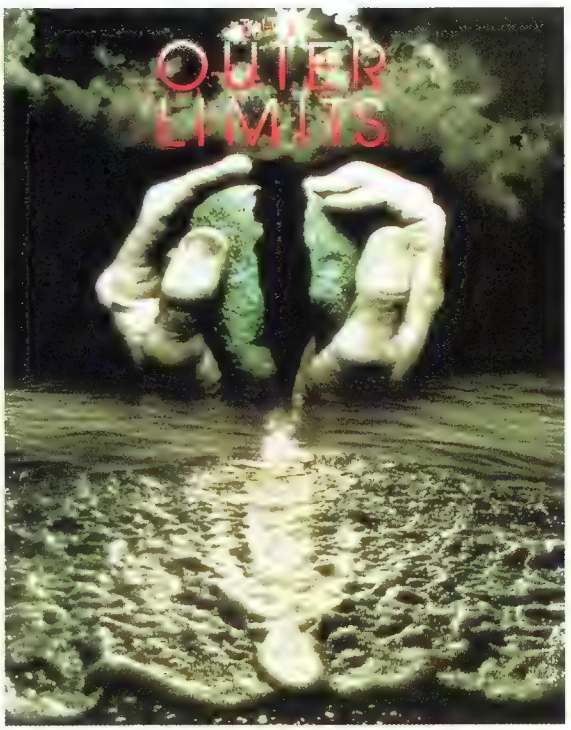
Production company: **Trilogy Entertainment**
Starring: **A load of B-list actors**
Showing: **BBC 2, Mondays, 9pm**

Text: **Paul Cornell**

In 1963, viewers were treated to 32 episodes of some of the most radical television ever broadcast – *The Outer Limits*. But what was it about this show that had such a startling effect? Aficionados pinpoint three main elements...

First, the programme had a tremendous visual style, with precisely-placed patches of light illuminating just the right bit of whatever was lurking in those black and white shadows. Second, there was a real sense of political terror – an ancestor of *The X-Files'* paranoia – where what the establishment did (in episodes l ke "O.B.I.T.") was just as terrifying as what the aliens had in mind. Finally, there was "the bear" – a stylishly-designed monster which always popped up sooner or later in every episode. Part of the fun was not knowing quite when it was going to appear...

Unfortunately, things aren't quite the same in this new version. Even the opening titles are disappointing. The original voiceover promised awe and mystery; but in the '90s outing the narrator makes it sound more like an advert for satellite TV than anything else (displaying loads of different channels during the preliminary spiel doesn't really help matters).



It's a shame the show's opening titles aren't as visually impressive...

Once the actual stories start, things don't generally improve much either. Strangely, the BBC decided not to show the US pilot episode first, so instead we were treated to the dismal "Blood Brothers," which is sadly reminiscent of the disappointing, watered-down second season of the original show. There are no cool visuals, only a hint of psychosocial terror – and, most importantly, no monster. The story concerns two brothers who battle over their discovery of an immortality drug, the only enigma the predictable storyline poses being why Martin Kemp isn't playing alongside his real-life brother Gary...

Still, the pilot, "Sandkings" – presumably pushed back because of its 90-minute length – was a great improvement. It owes a lot to both George RR Martin's original SF story (despite changing its setting from an alien world to rural America) and the old *Outer Limits*. There still isn't much in the way of visual style, but the old anti-establishment paranoia is back with a vengeance – and so, thankfully, are the monsters.

The sandkings themselves resemble the old series' Zanti Misfits – intelligent insects on the rampage. Not only are there real scares (the old series is still chilling – check out "Nightmare" or "The Architects Of Fear" for proof of that), but the pilot has the serious SF feel that always distanced the series from the pure fantasy of *The Twilight Zone*. What show, apart from *The Outer Limits*, could so subtly and cleverly portray the sandking

Coming soon – seasoned telefantasy guest star David "Evil" Warner in the episode "Virtual Future."

who first bites his creator's hand as a kind of insect Adam?

The next show, "Under The Bed," continued to scare, with its unflinching tale of a bogeyman who preys on children. Unfortunately, *The X-Files'* influence on the series is particularly obvious here, with the open-minded psychologist and disbelieving policewoman blatant Scully and Mulder clones. What a good monster though!

Completing the show's first month on air was "Valerie 23," which seems to take its inspiration from that little-seen movie *Eve of Destruction,* and features female robots. But while the AI angle is neatly dealt with, and it's very nice to see Nancy

Avoiding death seems to be the subject of a number of episodes of the new *Outer Limits.*

Allen from *RoboCop,* the story is once again horribly predictable.

Indeed, a philosophical twist-ending is the only reminder of the complexity of the old series, a thread of genuine paradigm-shifting SF that might turn out to be the only reason to watch the remaining episodes. Perhaps this is the influence of Joseph Stefano, the first producer of the original show, making itself felt – he's been employed here as a consultant. Maybe he ought to have a word with somebody in design. And with the script editor. And the directors... The potential of the original series is there, all right, but it needs someone to let it out.

C+

BABYLON 5

Production company: **Warner Bros TV**
Producer: **JM Straczynski**
Starring: **Bruce Boxleitner, Claudia Christian, Jerry Doyle**
Showing: **Channel 4, Tuesdays, 6pm**

Text: **Jim Swallow**

Just when we all thought we were going to see the last few episodes of the second *Babylon 5* season before US viewers, Channel 4 decides to put the show on hold. At first, it looked like C4 wasn't going to follow Warner Bros' move to keep back the final four episodes until October, but now it appears the schedulers have changed their mind again. And what a shame too, because the show's just getting into its stride...

One of the weakest of recent episodes was "There All Honour Lies," by the prolific *Star Trek* novelist (and *Hulk* writer) Peter David. It's a Minbari story of honour and duty (David's been writing about Klingons too long), in which Sheridan is accused of the murder of a Minbari by the only

Uh-oh – looks like there could be some snogging between Sheridan and Delenn in future episodes.

witness – another Minbari. Sheridan gets caught up in a labyrinthine web of clan loyalties and honour codes, but it's all rather swamped by the numerous subplots, including the enforced redundancy of Londo's aide, a lesson in "understanding himself" for Sheridan, and the short life of a gift shop in the Zocalo. (The latter seems to be a shrewd marketing move by Warners to showcase merchandise ideas.) It's a reasonably well-played story, but a bit of a mish-mash.

Much more interesting was "And Now for a Word," a JM Straczynski tale. The episode is presented as an ISN news report on the state of the spacestation, incorporating interviews, "live" footage of battle scenes and even subliminal messages. There's a kind of a plot, which follows the escalation of the Narn-Centauri conflict into an all-out war, but it unfolds entirely within the confines of the news report. Straczynski uses this unique format to its fullest, showcasing *B5's* willingness to be unconventional. It's a refreshing experiment which works brilliantly.

"In the Shadow of Z'Ha'Dum," again from Straczynski, is a pivotal episode in many respects, which reveals Kosh's secret identity, the origin of the Shadows, details about Sheridan's missing wife and the true nature of Londo's mysterious benefactor, Mr Morden. All meaty stuff for fans, though the story suffers from being little more than a clutch of revelations based on a thin premise.

Londo is turning into the real star of the show – and he's not being used just for comic relief either.

A better tale, telling two stories in parallel, is "Knives," written by script editor Lawrence DiTillio. It concentrates on Londo, with a B-story tying into the classic first season episode, "Babylon Squared." When Londo crosses paths with an old duelling partner, he finds himself forced to fight to the death to preserve his old friend's honour. Meanwhile, Sheridan becomes the unwitting host to an energy lifeform from another time, pulled in through the rift left by Babylon 4's disappearance. There are some fine dramatic moments in the last few minutes, with good character development for Sheridan and Londo.

Straczynski is back with "Confessions and Lamentation," an AIDS allegory about a plague sweeping through the Markab population on B5. In addition, the first elements of a possible Sheridan/Delenn romance emerge. But the most notable thing about this episode is the body count – over two billion. B5 goes into *Next Gen* "message mode" here, while the underused Doctor Franklin nabs some of the spotlight, and makes the most of it. It's a pity we don't get to see him more.

Babylon 5's main problem remains the way it unsuccessfully juggles its five-year story arc elements with the week-to-week plots, and the way important characters vanish or have little to do for episodes on end. That said, with the main story clearly growing in stature in recent months, this isn't proving to be so much of a problem – at least for fans. But will casual viewers be interested? Maybe not, with Boxleitner still acting like Paul Darrow in a trance...

Stuff still to come in the delayed last four episodes of the show includes a revelation that one of the Earth Alliance has been lying about something for quite some time, hundreds more dying on or near B5, the prediction of the death of one of the major characters, the identity of Control being revealed, the return of the telepath Lyta Alexander (last seen in the pilot episode), and another Vorlon ship arriving at the station. Sounds great.

Let's hope it's all worth the wait.

B

The entire cast of regulars – which is a pretty rare sight, since few episodes feature them together.

The month in TV

MORE RECENT GENRE (AND GENRE-RELATED) TV FROM THE PAST MONTH, INCLUDING THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED HIGHLANDER SERIES, PLUS COMING SOON AND SFX TERRESTRIAL/SATELLITE TV CHART.

HIGHLANDER – THE SERIES

Rysher Entertainment

Starring: **Adrian Paul, Jim Byrnes**
Showing: **Sky One, Wednesdays, 8pm**
Text: **Jon Abbott**

Adrian Paul is Duncan MacLeod, the TV version's Highlander.

There's an old gag about a guy who's so desperate for the secret of immortality, he spends months climbing the highest mountain in Tibet to speak to the master at the top who knows the secret of eternal life. When he finally gets there, starving, almost dead from exhaustion, and asks the monk his question, the wise man replies: "My son, you must eat no meat, drink no alcohol, smoke nothing, and never make love." To which the man queries: "And if I give up these things, will I live forever?" "No, my son," says the wise man, "but it will seem like it..."

I'm reminded of this dreadful joke every time I watch the *Highlander* TV series, one of the more stylish and attractive straight-to-syndication shows currently being broadcast, despite a shabby start. The series owes its recent classy look to co-financing from other countries, notably Canada and France, where many episodes are filmed as part of the deal.

Being apparently the only person in the world who hates both the strident music of Queen and the idiotic and vague *Highlander* premise, the series will never be a must-see for me, but the historical perspective and some marvellously inventive story ideas ("Pharaoh's Daughter" and "The Vampire" are particularly good) keep me checking in from time to time.

It would help if they had a better cast though – the supporting players leave much to be desired (Jim Byrnes is simply a reminder of the late, lamented *Wiseguy*), and Adrian Paul, while moody, remains an uncharismatic lead. But wouldn't it be a gas if the last immortal gets to receive the prize of ultimate wisdom, and it then turns out to be "Stop killing each other! You're immortal, for God's sake!"

C+

THE MUNSTERS

Universal

Starring: **Fred Gwynne, Al Lewis**
Showing: **BBC 2, Fridays, 6pm**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

As golden age US sitcoms go, this is one of the best. You probably already know the basic set-up, even if you've never actually seen an episode: A family of classic Hollywood movie monsters live in a creepy old house. Dad Herman is Frankenstein's creation; mom Lily and her father Grandpa are vampires; son Eddie is a wolfboy; and daughter Marilyn is – horror! – a normal human being. The central theme is that the Munsters think they're normal, Marilyn is ugly, and everyone else is mad when they run screaming from the house and its occupants.

If you think it all sounds very similar to the rather darker *The Addams Family* then you'd be right – the two mid-'60s shows started and finished within a week of each other, and both have stood the test of time well. Watch out for occasional cameos by one-time Dracula John Carradine as Herman's boss, by the way, and cartoon king Mel Blanc as the voice of the raven.

(NB. Don't confuse this classy series with the execrable '80s remake *The Munsters Today*, now showing at Saturday lunchtimes. It isn't a patch on the far funnier original series.)

B

WHITE DWARF

Hallmark Entertainment

Director: **Peter Markle**
Starring: **Paul Winfield, CCH Pounder, Neal McDonough**
Showing: **Fox TV, from 23 May (USA)**
Text: **Jonathan Norton**

Weird was big news on US TV a few years back, with *Twin Peaks*, *Wild Palms* and *Cop Rock* at the forefront of the bizarre brigade. Unfortunately, ratings were never good, and grittily realistic police and hospital dramas took over instead.

***White Dwarf*: Is it just *too* weird to make it to a full series?**

But some people just won't take poor ratings for an answer, and Bruce Wagner is one of them. He wrote for *Wild Palms* and has created this US TV pilot movie which outweirds anything else recently seen on US screens.

Neal McDonough plays the sarcastically patronising Dr Driscoll Rampart 3, who gets sentenced to six months on the planet Rusta, an odd place with two diametrically opposed, warring hemispheres – one light, one dark.

Rusta, which orbits a White Dwarf star, is an eclectic mix of styles – part Western, part medieval drama, part fantasy, and a lot of SF. The combination, thanks to some inspired production design by James Newport, is extremely effective, giving the show a mythical, ethereal quality unlike current TV offerings. Unfortunately, the dream-like atmosphere is reflected in the script, which, while interestingly quirky, often meanders and loses focus. Technically, however, standards are uniformly high, and there are some great special effects and make-up.

Will it be picked up for a series? Hard to say at this point. The format certainly has possibilities – there'll always be a market for weirdness – but this one's so odd, it's unlikely audiences will go for it in a big way.

B-

Forget *The Munsters Today*; the original show was infinitely superior.

Coming soon

Wonder Woman **29 July**
Sky One
The woman to whom spin cycles are more than just a matter of getting stains out of underwear is back. Linda Carter is Diana Prince is Wonder Woman in this gloriously daft '70s superhero romp.

The Tommyknockers
Channel 4 **1-2 August**
Two-part adaptation of the Stephen King novel in which a Western novelist digs up a spaceship which turns the townspeople a bit blobby.

SF Weekend **28 August**
Channel 4
Details have yet to be finalised, but judging by previous C4 theme weekends, this should be one Bank Holiday where you definitely don't want to be stuck in a contraflow on the M4.

SF TV Top Ten

seaQuest Sinks

The just-finished new series of ***Goodnight Sweetheart*** is only borderline SF, sure, but it still indicates that mainstream TV audiences are more prepared than ever to accept outlandish concepts in their safe, comfortable sitcoms. ***seaQuest DSV*** has briefly benefited from settling down into a regular, fairly high profile time slot, but generally viewing figures are down on last month. ***Bugs*** is another loser – it's shed roughly one-million viewers.

All the publicity for ***The Outer Limits*** has definitely paid off recently, though, because it's gone straight to the top of the BBC 2 chart in its first week.

The SFXclusive UK Top Ten TV Programmes

1. **Goodnight Sweetheart** (BBC 1)
2. **Bugs** (BBC 1)
3. **New Adventures of Superman** (BBC 1)
4. **Chiller** (ITV)
5. **The Outer Limits** (BBC 2)
6. **Star Trek: The Next Generation** (BBC 2)
7. **seaQuest DSV** (ITV)
8. **Babylon 5** (Channel 4)
9. **The Champions** (BBC 2)
10. **Captain Scarlet** (BBC 2)

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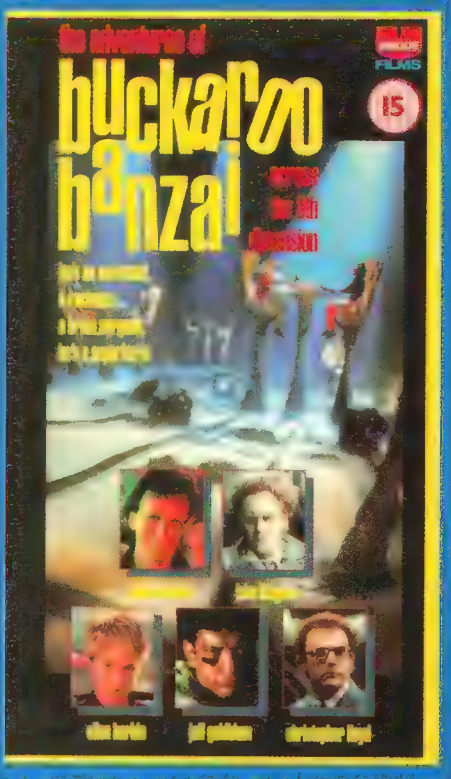

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"Technically, *Voyager* features some superb special effects – the pilot culminates in one of the best space battles ever created for a TV science fiction show."

STAR TREK VOYAGER

Old problems rear their heads in new ways with the latest Star Trek spin-off

"Caretaker"

Distributor: **CIC Video**
Director: **Winrich Kolbe**
Starring: **Kate Mulgrew, Robert Picardo, Robert Beltran**
Cert: **PG**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **90 mins**
Price: **£12.99**

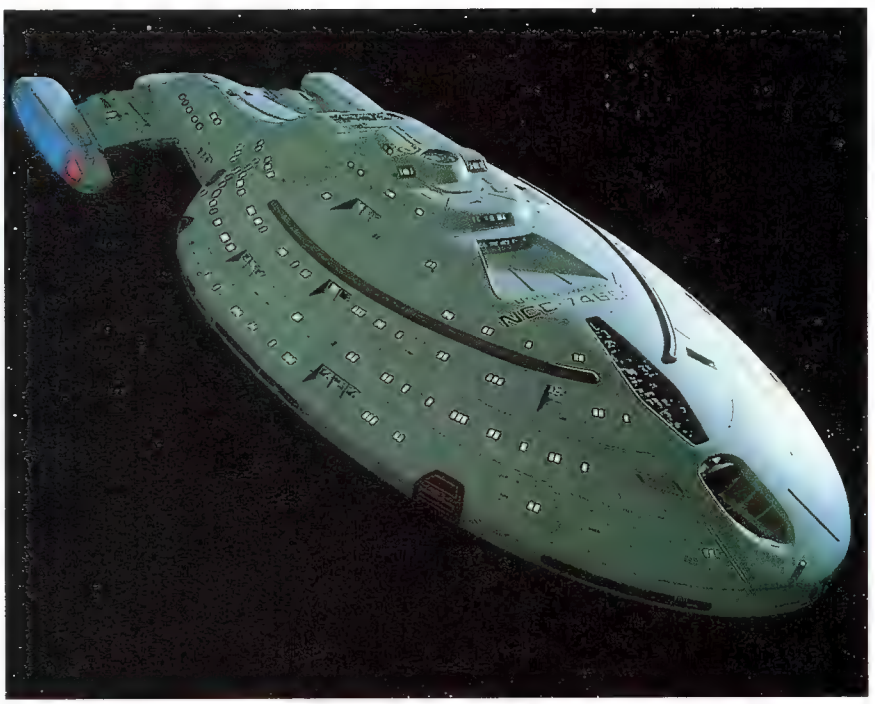
Text: **Dave Golder**

The *Star Trek* franchise is fast turning into some kind of Fantasy Starship Crew League. A new series means a new crew, but with the same old positions – and instead of strikers, defenders and wingers, we get Captains, Number Ones, Chiefs of Security, Doctors and Chief Engineers.

So after its first match of the season, how does the new *Trek* team shape up? Overall, it's a strong performance, with some classy teamwork and great attacking moves, but strategy definitely needs some work – there's far too much emphasis here on tried-and-tested manoeuvres.

As far as *Trek* pilots boldly go, "Caretaker" is much more successful than *The Next Generation's* "Encounter At Farpoint" or *Deep Space Nine's*

In a previous life, Janeway was Mrs McClusky, we reckon.



A souped-up sports version of the USS Enterprise, or a flying commode? The Voyager ship itself has certainly sparked off controversy.

"Emissary." The plot's still more convoluted than a Freudian thesis on radiators in *Eraserhead,* but it moves along at a cracking pace and does a far better job of introducing the characters.

The set-up goes something like this: While in pursuit of a rebel Maquis ship that's vanished in an area of space known as the Badlands, the USS Voyager is transported millions of light years across the galaxy by an entity called the Caretaker. The same thing, it turns out, has happened to the Maquis vessel, so when the two ships bump into each other they find themselves facing the same problems, and the two opposing crews decide to work together and find a way back home.

They don't, by the way. Get home, that is. Sorry if that's ruined it all for you, but that's the point – when the Marquis ship is destroyed, the two opposing crews are forced to integrate, then search for a shortcut back to the Alpha Quadrant, some 70 years away at warp nine. Cue many future episodes' worth of inter-crew dramatic tension.

The cast impresses immediately. Coming on like Katherine Hepburn playing the headmistress of St Trinians, Kate Mulgrew is superb as Captain Janeway. She oozes authority, but always remains more approachable and ready to muck in than Picard. Another immediate star is Robert Picardo as the holographic Doctor with an attitude – the attitude that patients just get in the way. Tuvok is the show's first black Vulcan, and Tim Russ injects the role with a nice line in sarcasm.

Providing comic relief is Neelix (Ethan Phillips), a lumpy-headed alien scavenger the crew picks up in the Delta quadrant. Strangely for a character designed to provide comic relief in a US drama series, he's actually funny, although there is the possibility he might become intensely irritating in future episodes. Jennifer Lien is Kes, his star-crossed lover and the show's requisite space babe. Prepare to go "Yuck" when she snogs Neelix (then defend yourself when your politically correct mate points out that the first inter-racial kiss broadcast on US TV was, in fact, during a classic *Trek* episode, and this is just the '90s equivalent...).

Tom Paris is the resident young lech, a Starfleet defector who's been released from prison because he's – yawn – the best pilot in the galaxy. Written as a complete cliché, Robert Duncan McNeill actually manages to bring the character to life as a charismatic, almost cheeky cockney-like fellow. But without the cockney accent, thankfully.

Less impressive on their initial outings are Chakotay, the Maquis captain whom Janeway makes her Number One, Harry Kim, the fresh-out-of-Starfleet ensign, and B'Ellana Torres, the Klingon/human half breed who has to reconcile the two halves of her nature. Standard *Star Trek* stand-bys the lot of 'em, but convincingly played all the same, so give them time (or better still, decent scripts). All in all, an impressive set-up, with a good defence and a superb centre-forward – but a bit of weakness in midfield.

Problems arise when they get on the pitch. Clinically-executed teamwork only just disguises an over-dependence on what we've seen countless times before – the enigmatic, all-powerful being; the holographically-created idyllic setting; plenty of quibbling about the prime directive; alien enemies with bumpy foreheads; awful technobabble...

Technically, however, the *Voyager* lot are on the ball and running. The show features some superb special effects, this pilot culminating in one of the best space battles ever created for TV, and make-up and costumes are great too. It's just a shame the generally impressive sets are let down by the interior of the Ocampan planet, which looks like it's been filmed in Brent Cross shopping centre.

A strong, but far from perfect, opening performance then. *Voyager* has the potential to be league champion, but to get there it needs to take risks and develop a few more original moves. Maybe signing up another star player or two (a decent baddie would be nice) would help. Still, one thing's for sure – the debut of *Voyager* suddenly pushes *Deep Space Nine* further into the relegation zone.

B+

STARGATE

Kurt Russell is, er, Kurt Russell (as usual).

Distributor: **Guild**
Director: **Roland Emerich**
Starring: **Kurt Russell, James Spader, Jaye Davidson**
Cert: **15**
Release: **Out now (rental)**
Running time: **116 mins**

Text: **MJ Simpson**

The loneliest man in the world is the SFX writer who actually likes *Stargate* – and here I am! Despite editorial protestations of its crapness, some of us actually *enjoyed* this piece of cheerful SF hokum. Sure, it's derivative – but *Star Wars* was hardly original, was it? This is a rollicking good yarn of a gang of US marines – plus Spader's token scientist – stranded on a desert planet a million light years from home.

The first 20-30 minutes, set on Earth, are rather hurried, but that will hopefully be rectified in the forthcoming Director's Cut. And while the sweeping cinematography of the endless dunes loses a lot on video, there's still plenty of excitement, groovy effects and a touch of romance to enjoy. Basically, if you liked *Stargate* at the cinema, you'll love it on video too – and can look forward to two sequels and a series of novels which will develop the scenario even further. And if you haven't seen it? Well, check it out – although, as our esteemed Editor demonstrates, it may not be to your taste. (There's no pleasing some folk, is there?)

B

Cheerful SF hokum or a load of dross? Yes, *you* are the jury.

ALIEN NATION: DARK HORIZON

Cathy (Terri Treas) meets the scout from the mothership.

Distributor: **Fox Video**
Cert: **12**
Director: **Kenneth Johnson**
Starring: **Gary Graham, Eric Pierpoint, Michele Scarabelli**
Release date: **Out now (rental)**
Running time: **89 mins**

Text: **MJ Simpson**

Susan and George (*née* Sam) Francisco.

The 1988 *Alien Nation* movie could easily have been a standard cop flick with a bit of action and a few funny aliens, but – against all expectations – it actually turned out to be an exciting thriller which raised some important questions. The following TV series was even better, exploring an original SF idea – the arrival on Earth of 250,000 Tenctonese alien refugees – to the utmost.

Last year, the late '80s TV series turned up on British terrestrial TV (it was shown on satellite years ago), and ended with a spectacular cliff-hanger, where George Francisco's wife and daughter had fallen victim to a deadly, newcomers-only virus which had been developed by the human "purists." *Dark Horizon* not only wraps up this storyline, but introduces an even bigger threat: A Tenctonese scout who comes to Earth to find out what happened to his quarter-of-a-million slaves...

The two stories intertwine, and feature all the original characters (played by the original cast). The purists are realistically presented too, not as mad Nazis, but as intelligent people who can't cope with the newcomers and use them as a scapegoat for the world's ills. On both a global and a personal level, and as an SF movie, cop flick and racial allegory, *Dark Horizon* works well. But while it's a good feature-length episode of the TV series, it might have worked a lot better as a two-hour theatrical release. That would then have allowed for a slightly less rushed climax and a bigger effects budget (the CGI mother ship is excellent, but the Tenctonese scout ship is a tad dodgy).

The biggest problem is the conclusion, which looks as if some studio executive has interfered at the last minute to secure an audience-friendly happy ending. Nevertheless, this is a fine continuation of a superb series. And it's good to hear that two more *Alien Nation* TV movies are in the offing too.

B+

THE X-FILES

Distributor: **Fox Video**
Executive Producer: **Chris Carter**
Starring: **David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson**
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£10.99 each**

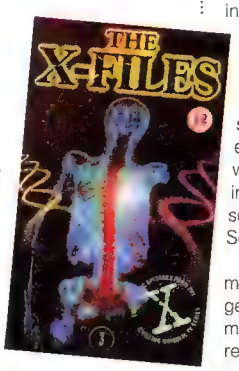
Volume 3 Jersey Devil, Shadows (89 mins) Cert: **12** — B

Volume 4 Ghost in the Machine, Ice (89 mins) Cert: **15** — B

Text: **Matt Bielby**

Scully is as cynical as ever in these episodes from the early days. Odd how *those* events always occur when she's out of shot though...

Back at the beginning of '94, I was stuck in North Carolina for a few months, and – as anyone who's been to North Carolina can tell you – television pretty much saved my life. From the brain-sucking mess of it, I sought out the few good programmes that could keep me going – re-runs of *Star Trek: TNG* and *Cheers*, a hot new cop show called *NYPD Blue* and, best of all, this cultish, low-rated, always-on-the-verge-of-being-cancelled thing called *The X-Files*. This was in the days before *The X-Files* became a hit, of course, when the rare foresight of some anonymous Fox executive was the only thing keeping it on the air.



I have a fair amount of affection for the show, then, and for these early episodes in particular. We're going back right to the beginning here – to a time when cynical Scully seemed to spend half her time mocking FBI partner Mulder's preoccupation with the paranormal, and inter-departmental intrigue was left very much on the backburner. Not that you can blame Scully for her scepticism. Most of the time, obvious paranormal activity seems to cease the minute she comes on the scene – at one point, for example, Mulder's standing there, open-mouthed, watching the body of a street thug being lifted into the air by some unseen psychic force, only to see it drop innocently to the floor the second Scully wanders into the room!

It's a fun show, though – moody yet fast-moving, and populated with appealing and generally non-clichéd characters. What it doesn't manage, however, is to be quite as good as I remember it. To plough through what are effectively mini-horror films in 45 minutes or so means the scriptwriters have to drop clues in our heroes' laps every ten minutes or so, while frightening moments are disappointingly thin on the ground – there are only a few effective scares in all four episodes featured here. Occasional ill-judged moments – the horribly cute feral kid at the end of "Jersey Devil," the ludicrous moment in "Ghost in the Machine" where (surprise!) the sentient supercomputer, which we thought destroyed, manages to turn itself back on – undermine things rather too.

Of the episodes here, "Jersey Devil" – where the cannibalistic caveman terrorising down-and-outs in Atlantic City turns out to be a cute dark haired girl who looks like she's been rolling in soot for a while – is a bit of a disappointment, while "Shadows," the one with the apparently psychic secretary who, *Carrie*-like, can't control her power, surprises at every twist, and is fairly scary a lot of the time too.

Meanwhile, "Ghost in the Machine" – the one with the hyper-intelligent supercomputer that tries to kill everyone who looks like they might want to turn it off – is laughable and genuinely surprising in almost equal measure. "Ice," on the other hand, starts off like the John Carpenter epic *The Thing* but soon shoots off in its own direction, shrugging off some obvious comparisons to become perhaps the pick of the bunch. It's good enough to make volume four perhaps slightly better value than volume three, but only just.

The X-Files gets better than any of the individual episodes on display here, but not by much. Sure, it's good, and deserves all the success it's had, but you can't help feeling it's got the potential to be a whole lot better too.

KILLER B'S

NEW ADDITIONS TO FIRST CLASS FILMS' LESS-THAN-CLASSIC SERIES...

The Cosmic Man (70 mins)
Director: **Herbert Greene**
Starring: **John Carradine, Bruce Bennett, Herman Green** — B

The Day It Came To Earth (84 mins)
Director: **Harry Z Thomason**
Starring: **Roger Manning, Wink Roberts, George Gobel** — C+

The Hideous Sun Demon (72 mins)
Director: **Robert Clarke**
Starring: **Robert Clarke, Patricia Manning, Del Courtney** — B

Distributor: **First Class Films**
Certs: **PG**
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£12.99 each**

Text: **MJ Simpson**

Assigning grades to films like these is a difficult task because whether you think they're "good" or not depends very much on how you approach them. If our normal grading system is applied to the entire spectrum of SF movies, you see, none of these films would rate more than a D at max.

However, if you're even considering shelling out £12.99 on a '50s B-movie, I'll assume you know roughly what you're getting for your money – i.e. no characterisation, low-tech effects and low-budget cinematography. The problem here is that these films, while often poor, aren't as consistently hopeless – and hence entertaining – as Ed Wood's Z-grade efforts (see facing page). So the gradings given here represent how worthwhile each title is for someone who has at least a *passing* interest in such fare.

Comparisons between *The Cosmic Man* and 1951's *The Day The Earth Stood Still* are inevitable. A mysterious spaceship is discovered, military and scientists argue over whether to communicate with it or destroy it, and John Carradine slopes around in the shadows, occasionally appearing as a strange negative superimposed special effect. Enjoyable, if a lot more heavy-handed than *TDTESS*, but still well-meaning and a good example of its genre.

Hideous Sun Demon features some fairly groovy make-up effects as Robert Clarke turns into a lizard-man when exposed to sunlight. Copious day-for-night filming results in Clarke bemoaning "I can't go out in daylight!" as the sun beats down from a cloudless sky. But the oddest film in the batch is *The Day It Came To Earth*, in which a gangster's bedraggled corpse is reanimated by the arrival of a mysterious meteorite. This dates from 1977, which goes to show that bad film-making didn't die when the '50s ended.

The print quality is generally good on all these films, and all are worthwhile buys for fans of the B-movie genre, with *Cosmic Man* probably the best and *Sun Demon* the cheesiest.

(Note: *The Flying Saucer* (1950), originally due out along with these additions to the Killer B's series, won't now be released until July. We'll have a review of that title in next month's issue of SFX.)

MANGA MANIA

THIS MONTH'S CROP OF JAPANESE ANIMATION...

A fearsome demon (or something) from *Angel Cop 2*. Be frightened.

Angel Cop 2 (18) **(30 mins) £5.99** — C+

The Legend of the 4 Kings Chapters 9 & 10 (12) **(92 mins) £13.99** — C+

Megazone 23 (15) **(100 mins) £13.99** — B-

New Dominion: Tank Police Act 7 (12) **(30 mins) £5.99** — C

Patlabor (PG) **(99 mins) £13.99** — A-

Er, what's going on in *Megazone 23*, exactly?

Distributor: **Manga UK**
Text: **Jonathan Davies**

It's difficult to say who's more confused – Eiji Takanaka or me. "Huh?" shrugs Eiji as he sits inside a robotic exoskeleton watching a computer-generated pop video. The screen divides in two, with a different Eiji in

SO BAD IT'S GOOD

THE FILMS OF ED WOOD

Bride of the Monster (71 mins)
Starring: **Bela Lugosi, Tor Johnson**
Cert: **PG**

Glen or Glenda (75 mins)
Starring: **Ed Wood, Bela Lugosi, Dolores Fuller**
Cert: **15**

Jail Bait (71 mins)
Starring: **Dolores Fuller, Lyle Talbot**
Cert: **PG**

Night of the Ghouls (68 mins)
Starring: **Tor Johnson, Valda Hansen**
Cert: **PG**

STAY AWAY FROM THEM... They're Jail Bait!
JAIL BAIT
DOLORES FULLER · LYLE TALBOT
STEVE REEVES · THEODORA THURMAN
Original Screenplay by ALEX GORDON and EDWARD D. WOOD, Jr.
Produced and Directed by EDWARD D. WOOD, Jr.
A HOWCO PRODUCTION

Plan Nine from Outer Space (78 mins)
Starring: **Bela Lugosi, Tor Johnson**
Cert: **PG**

Distributor: **Pickwick**
Director: **Edward D Wood Jr**
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£9.99 each**

Text: **MJ Simpson**

This rare early Ed Wood film stars Dolores Fuller... before she found out about Ed's angora fetish.

Along with *The Bride and the Beast* (which Pickwick is also releasing soon), these are the definitive works of Ed Wood, the Worst Film Director Of All Time.

Glen or Glenda isn't SF, although the presence of Lugosi makes it of enough interest to cover here. Ostensibly, it tells the story of "Glen who was Glenda," a transvestite with an angora fetish. More accurately, it's a series of loosely connected semi-documentary sequences, occasionally interrupted by the omnipotent "scientist" Lugosi superimposed over various images. "Pull ze strink!" he cries as stock footage of a buffalo stampede runs behind him! It's a crass exploitation flick made by someone who actually cared about the subject, and is therefore unique. Producer George Weiss added 20 minutes of clips from stag movies without Wood's approval – but that just makes things even better.

Plan Nine from Outer Space's position as The Worst Film Ever Made seems frankly unassailable, simply because nobody could have tried as hard to produce so little. His cheerful disregard for the minor technicalities of film-making – realistic sets, talented actors, continuity – makes this in some ways a deeply surreal movie. Recommended .

Bride of the Monster is almost as good (bad?). Lugosi has a ball as a mad scientist, gloating over an octopus monster – essentially an inanimate rubber puppet – and, again, there's plenty of stock footage. And, yes, Tor Johnson is yet again a brute – with an angora fetish. Unlike other old B-movies, though, Wood's work never gets boring because there are always so many faults to spot. Watch out for doors that change design when actors open them, for example, or the appearing-disappearing file clerk's pencil.

Night of the Ghouls is a "semi-sequel" to *Plan Nine,* and has the same mix of Tor Johnson, dodgy laboratory sets and – yes! – angora sweaters. Plus a female ghost in a black veil who's clearly played by a man.

The rarest title here is *Jail Bait,* a gangster flick with a touch of medical horror. It lacks most of the Wood rep company, but does have the worst choreographed fight scenes in history, the least thrilling car-chase ever, and sometime Hercules Steve Reeves! Sets wobble, the leads can't act, and the detective looks remarkably like *Naked Video's* "Baldie Man." To those familiar with Wood's *oeuvre,* this makes for a pleasant change and proves he was equally inept in any genre.

Pickwick's copies are from pretty good prints, although a little scratchy at reel change-overs. The sound quality, however, is occasionally poor, but that's historically accurate – especially on *Glen or Glenda,* which sounds like it's been edited with staples. Each tape (except *Night of the Ghouls,* for some reason) also comes with the relevant trailer.

All five titles are heartily recommended, but *Plan Nine from Outer Space* is the most essential buy for Wood novices.

The best of this month's oriental bunch is undoubtedly *Patlabor*, a tale of robotic exoskeletons and a city in the sea. It even makes sense.

each half, and everything turns blue. I study the notes on the back of the video box again.

The pre-credit intro sequence to *Megazone 23* claims that, following the usual environmental catastrophe, mankind has been shipped into giant cities in space. A huge computer generates a virtual reality which fools Eiji into believing he's still on Earth – at least until he's allowed to return to the real thing in 500 years' time. This idea, however, is strangely abandoned once the film gets going – we're still in the gigantic city, complete with supercomputer, but also inexplicably back on *terra firma.* Er, excuse me?

Anyway, Eiji is a new recruit to the XI, a government department which has been set up to protect said computer from evil "netjackers." His job involves sitting on a special motorbike in front of a screen, patrolling the "virtual highway." Or something. Except he can also ride the bike home. And give his girlfriend rides on it when she's not in the shower.

Megazone 23 looks fantastic, with an impressive vision of the future. And there are plenty of fights, bike chases and police helicopters hovering sinisterly overhead. It's just desperately confusing, that's all.

Meanwhile, in *Tank Police: Act 7,* a huge truck laden with explosives is heading for Newport City under computer control. Terrorists are to blame, and only our tank-borne chums stand in its path. You always know where you stand with *Tank Police.* The storyline is entirely surprise-free, although the cops seem eager to suggest otherwise with their incessant "Huh?"s and 'What the?"s. And the humour isn't even worth mentioning.

It's best not to cross the *Tank Police.* Their battle truncheons are *huge...*

***Legend of the 4 Kings* rambles on a bit, but it's got dragons.**

In *Angel Cop 2,* however, it's not entirely clear whose side we're meant to be on. The terrorists? The mysterious girl who regularly incinerates people? The Special Security Force? "This entire operation doesn't make any kind of sense," admitted one of the characters as my bewilderment grew. But if you're prepared to overlook this deficiency, the frequent "Aaarrghh!"s and coughings up of blood just about disguise the baffling plot.

I must admit I have a bit of a soft spot for *The Legend of the 4 Kings.* The animation may be poor, but at least the storyline is vaguely comprehensible. And the theme tune's good. The Ryudo brothers continue to explore their mysterious superpowers – and Owaru discovers he's got some too... After being captured and held at an airbase, that is, whereupon he turns into the White Dragon of the Wind and wreaks predictable havoc. Then, in Part 10, Lady L manages to arrange the brothers' arrest and uses a special morphing robot to cause further trouble. Admittedly, though, this is all overstretched at an hour-and-a-half, and only a fraction as entertaining as your average low-budget action movie.

So it was with relief that I turned to *Patlabor.* It's the future, and the Japanese have cornered the market in giant robots called "labors." These are piloted by human beings and employed by the military and the construction industry. Except that, recently, labors have developed minds of their own and started running amok, crushing cities and killing people. Enter a crack unit of police to sort things out.

Patlabor opens with an excellent chase through the jungle, and features some fine action scenes. It's also one of those rare anime films that looks as good in motion as it does on the box, thanks to some imaginative "camera" angles and thoughtful use of shade and reflections. Best of all, it makes *sense...*

UNSPEAKABLE HORRORS FROM OUTER SPACE PARALYZE THE LIVING AND RESURRECT THE DEAD!
PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE
BELA LUGOSI
VAMPIRA
LYLE TALBOT
A J. Edward Reynolds Production
Produced and Directed by Edward D. Wood, Jr.

The poster may look tacky, but it's a work of art compared to the legendary turkey it's advertising.

Rian Hughes

The month in VIDEO

ALL SORTS OF NEW SF/FANTASY VIDEOS ON SELL-THROUGH AND RENTAL, CHARTS, PLUS NEWS OF FUTURE RELEASES...

THE ADVENTURES OF BUCKAROO BANZAI ACROSS THE EIGHTH DIMENSION

Art House Television

Cert: **15**
Director: **WD Richter**
Starring: **Peter Weller, John Lithgow, Ellen Barkin, Christopher Lloyd**
Release: **17 July**
Price: **£12.99**
Running time: **102 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

***Buckaroo Banzai* is one of those films with a reputation that's grown mainly because hardly anyone's seen it. Originally released in 1984, it's achieved cult status mostly through drunken conversations down the pub – "'Ave you seen that *Buck'roo Banzee* thing? S'great. Dead funny. Get it out on vid." Sure enough, you pop down your local Joe's Videos, only to discover through a stubborn hangover haze that they haven't got it, never had it and very likely don't know what you're talking about.**

Well, now it's finally being released on sell-through – and the truth is out. *Banzai* is a bizarre SF spoof on, well, just about anything going – but misses the target as often as it hits. Peter *(RoboCop)* Weller plays the eponymous hero, a half-American, half-Japanese neurosurgeon-cum-superhero who accidentally unleashes aliens from the Eighth Dimension. It's now up to Banzai and his team of cowboy/scientist sidekicks (including Jeff Goldblum) to save the planet.

It's entertaining enough – there's an energetic cast, including love interest Ellen Barkin, and the design work is great – but, while there are some superbly off-beat moments and amusing lines, all too often it's left to the actors to shout and wave their arms about. The plot takes a fair while to get going too.

In the end, though, it's the sheer unrelenting absurdity of *Buckaroo Banzai* that carries it into worthwhile territory. It comes across like an episode of a long-running TV series (if we're to believe the film there's a *Buckaroo Banzai* fan club, tons of merchandising and even a record already in circulation); the arrogant self-assurance actually coming across as strangely appealing.

And at least now you can tell the pub bore what it's *really* like.

B

Buckaroo Banzai (Peter Weller) and his trusty team of sidekicks, the Hong Kong Cavaliers (including an early appearance by Jeff Goldblum).

CASINO ROYALE

Retro Video

Cert: **PG**
Director: **William H Brown**
Starring: **Barry Nelson, Peter Lorre**
Release date: **3 July**
Price: **£9.99**
Running time: **48 mins**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

As all pedants know, the first person to play James Bond was not young Mr Connery but Barry *(The Shining)* Nelson, in this live telecast on 21 October 1954. If, as Ian Fleming hoped, this had spun off into a TV series, then James Bond may have become permanently American. Here, he collaborates with British agent Clarence Leiter (Michael Pate) to destroy Soviet agent Le Chiffre, played by the legendary Peter Lorre, by bankrupting him at baccarat. Allowing for the hour-with-ads running time, this is fairly true to the first Bond novel, which was based on an actual incident Fleming witnessed in Portugal during the war.

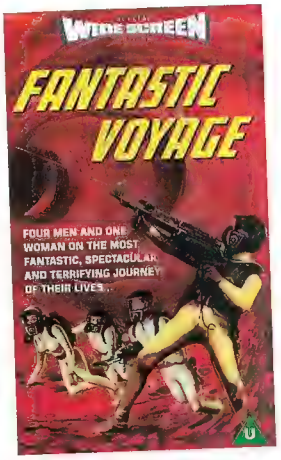
Not only is this long-thought-lost-forever programme an essential buy for all secret agent addicts, it's also a rare example of live '50s US TV drama, complete with lighting and sound gaffs. Although the acting is stilted and the sets limited, the quality of this recording is surprisingly good. And despite ending very suddenly, presumably because the action over-ran by a few seconds, this is a tremendously important release, for which Retro is to be congratulated.

B+

FANTASTIC VOYAGE (WIDESCREEN)

Fox Video

Cert: **U**
Director: **Richard Fleischer**
Starring: **Stephen Boyd, Raquel Welch, Donald Pleasence**
Price: **£12.99**
Release date: **Out now**
Running time: **100 minutes**
Text: **Dave Golder**


WIDESCREEN
FANTASTIC VOYAGE
FOUR MEN AND ONE WOMAN ON THE MOST FANTASTIC, SPECTACULAR AND TERRIFYING JOURNEY OF THEIR LIVES...
U

Kubrick's *2001* might have been "the ultimate trip," but *Fantastic Voyage* (1966 – some three years before *Odyssey)* has more than its fair share of psychedelic moments. Indeed, according to director Richard Fleischer's vision, the inside of the human body looks like a cross between the inside of a '60s student bedsit and an oil lamp – all fluorescent blobs and billowing drapes.

When a top scientist is shot and suffers brain damage, the US authorities shrink a team of doctors and military types, including Raquel Welch and Donald Pleasence, and inject them into the scientist's bloodstream aboard a similarly miniaturised sub. The team must then pilot said sub to the clot and remove it before they revert to their normal size, a task made trickier by the presence of a traitor.

Ironically, despite some ham-fisted matting work that makes it look like the actors have been eating Ready Brek, and sets which often look like a pantomime Aladdin's cave, *Fantastic Voyage* has aged better than its '80s counterpart, *InnerSpace*. Watch that now and you can't help thinking, "Ah, early computer effects – how quaint." With *Voyage*, the effects might not be too convincing, but they are pretty.

What makes the film immensely watchable, even after all these years, is that the far-fetched plot is acted and directed with complete conviction when it would have been so easy to camp it all up. And there are some great SF images tucked away here, especially the whole miniaturisation sequence, and the dying scientist on the operating table with a navigation grid drawn all over his bald head. Oh yeah, and then there's Raquel Welch in a skin tight wetsuit.

Available in Widescreen on video for the first time, this is a top slice of '60s SF hokum that benefits greatly from not being miniaturised to fit on a TV screen. Not great, but you can't help liking it.

B

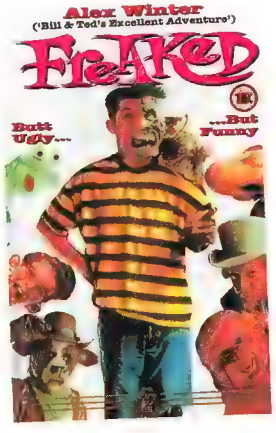
FREAKED

Guild Home Video

Cert: **15**
Directors: **Alex Winter and Tom Stern**
Starring: **Alex Winter, Keanu Reeves, Randy Quaid, Mr T, Brooke Shields**
Release: **Out now (rental)**
Running time: **81 mins**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

For his directorial debut, the one who isn't Keanu in *Bill & Ted* has assembled an eclectic cast. More than that – and some would say against all the odds – he's created a creasingly funny movie too.

Winter plays movie star Ricky Coogin, who travels to South America to promote illegal fertiliser Zygrot 24. With two associates, he visits a strange freak-show run by mad scientist Elijah C Skuggs (Randy Quaid), and they find themselves transformed by Zygrot 24 into Hideous Mutant Freaks. Among the other unfortunates in Elijah



C Skuggs' collection are Ortiz the Dog Boy (an unrecognisable Keanu Reeves doing his old mate a favour), Sockhead (Bobcat Goldthwait transformed into a hand puppet), and Frog Man (a guy in a wetsuit). Together they devise a plan to escape from Skuggs' evil clutches.

If you like your comedy deeply silly, with lots of references to US TV shows and well-known people in odd roles (Brooke Shields is great), then *Freaked* is a must-see video. The make-up (by Screaming Mad George) is good, and there's some terrific stop-motion work. The characters are bizarre, the script well-written, and the jokes come thick and fast. *Citizen Kane* it ain't, but a terrific party movie it most definitely is.

Look out – it's a hopeless reject from the *Power Rangers!*

placed trees. All in all, then, an enjoyable if mindless romp. Don't expect anything beyond sub-standard *Godzilla* monster-battles and you won't be disappointed.

Hellbound

Warner Home Video

Cert: **18**
Director: **Aaron Norris**
Starring: **Chuck Norris, Calvin Levels, Christopher Neame**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **91 mins**
Price: **£10.99**
Text: **Dave Golder**

You always know what you're going to get with a Chuck Norris flick, and it's the same with *Hellbound* – despite a tricky opening scene, set in Jerusalem during the Crusades, which certainly had me fooled for a minute or two. Of course, my surprise wasn't to last for long – once Richard the Lionheart had trapped the demonic evil guy who refuses to die in an enchanted tomb, the action moved forward 800 years. Suddenly it was business as usual, with Chicago cop Chuck dealing with pimps, drug dealers and grumpy old police chiefs in his inimitable fashion.

The two plot lines do bump into each other, of course, but never with quite the force you'd expect. Sure enough, said bad guy is soon released from his tomb and begins wreaking havoc – ripping hearts out of passing archaeologists and nipping into first class railway carriages without a ticket – while Chuck gets wrapped up in a plot that comes across like *Angel Heart* meets *Indy Jones*.

The big problem is that it's still a Chuck Norris film. Unashamedly packed with clichéd situations, clichéd characters, clichéd lines, and even clichéd opening titles, *Hellbound* is a mindnumbingly banal shocker, with few real surprises up its sleeve. On the plus side, it moves along at a cracking pace, and there are a couple of okay fight scenes of the type *Street Fighter* could have done with.

But as post lager and curry fodder it's all a bit lacklustre – and not bad enough to really get you laughing your lungs up.

The Guyver: Dark Hero

MIA Video

Cert: **15**
Director: **Steve Wang**
Starring: **David Hayter, Kathy Christopherson, Christopher Michael**
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£12.99**
Running time: **100 mins**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

Although you wouldn't know it from the packaging, this is actually a sequel made in the USA (although it's very Japanese in style), which was released over there as *Guyver 2: Dark Hero*. I don't know if the first film is out in the UK, but at least a dozen volumes of the original Japanese anime on which these movies are based definitely are.

Dark Hero offers only the most perfunctory explanation of what the "Guyver" actually is – some sort of alien bio-armour, which in its dormant state inhabits a lump on the back of hero Sean Barker's neck. How much control Barker (David Hayter) has over the deployment of the Guyver is, however, not explained.

The plot – such as it is – basically retreads *The Thing*, complete with alien spaceship discovered by an archeological expedition, some members of which have ulterior motives. SFX's advice is simply to forget the plot. Instead, just sit back and enjoy the hilarious fights between the Guyver and assorted monsters of the blokes-in-rubber-suits variety.

Basically, *The Guyver* proves that crap monster flicks are not the prerogative of the Land of the Rising Laserdisc. There are one or two decent effects, but most of the Barker/Guyver transformations happen as he walks behind conveniently

THANK GOD IT'S OVER...

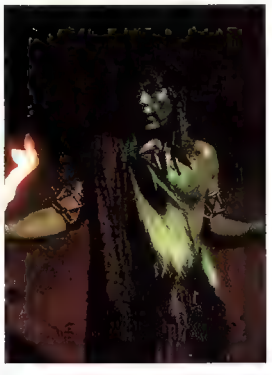
Doctor Who The Power of Kroll

BBC Video

Cert: **PG**
Director: **Norman Stewart**
Starring: **Tom Baker, Mary Tamm**
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£11.99**
Running time: **92 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

There are some things that shouldn't be done. Or even attempted. Or even thought about. Doctor Who doing a version of *The Beast from 2,000 Fathoms* is one of them. For proof you need only look at "The Power of Kroll".

The quest for the fifth segment of the Key To Time (Yes, it's *still* going on...) takes the Doctor and Romana to a marshy moon orbiting the Earth colony Delta Magna. The place is a reservation for giant-squid-worshipping marshmen who were shunted there from Delta Magna when the Earth colonists took a fancy to the planet. Trouble is, the colonists have discovered a rich source of energy in the marshes and are planning to cover the moon with refineries.



Red skins become green skins in "The Power of Kroll."

Okay, so it's all a thinly-disguised allegory for the plight of the American Indians. Except that the Indians never had a giant squid to worship. Then again, neither have the marshmen. What they've actually got is a dodgy model, badly matted onto the background, and a few rubber tentacles. As gods go, it's a pretty poor showing.

As is all too often the case, the only thing worth watching is Tom Baker, who walks away with the show. But in this case, it's like stealing candy from a baby. An inexcusably pedestrian plot from one of the shows finest writers, Robert ("Ark in Space," "Talons of Weng Chiang") Holmes, is barely brought to life by sets, acting, costumes and special effects that range from the nopeless to the derisory.

Ah well, you can always liven up this sorry mess by getting a few friends round and running a sweepstake on which of the actors will be first to pull a tacky rubber tentacle around himself and go splashing into the swamp.

Doctor Who The Armageddon Factor

BBC Video

Cert: **U**
Director: **Michael Hayes**
Starring: **Tom Baker, Mary Tamm**
Release: **Out now**

Tom Baker met his future wife Lalla Ward on "The Armageddon Factor."

Price: **£16.99**
Running time: **149 mins**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

At bleedin' last. The Key To Time season comes to an end. I would say a climax, but that's overstating the case just a bit. To be fair, though, "The Armageddon Factor" is one of the better stories in this laughable saga, with a cringe-per-minute rating well below average.

That's not to say that the six episodes presented here don't drag, though, because they do – indeed, the two-planets-locked-in-nuclear-war plot is so rambling it's hard to work out exactly why what's going on is going on at all. Still, thanks to an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach to scripting, "The Armageddon Factor" is packed with interesting incidental concepts, intriguing images and memorable moments – time loops, invincible super-computers, a two-inch high Doctor, alien soap operas, the lot.

Happily, the acting largely eschews the campiness of the later Baker years, with John Woodvine, in particular, impressing as the underused Marshal. William Squire makes a spooky villain out of the Shadow too, helped by a simple but striking skull-like costume design. And who could forget the introduction of Lalla Ward – soon to play the second Romana, and, later, Baker's wife – as the rather wet Princess Astra?

Production values are generally up on the rest of the season as well, with some half-decent sets that, for once, are lit with slightly more subtlety than a supermarket deli counter. Even a few of the special effects are almost convincing.

Nothing, however, can account for the inexcusably lame final showdown with the Black Guardian – after 26 episodes, I expected something more than a verbal slanging match conducted through the TARDIS scanner. He's a completely unimpressive villain, and here at the SFX office we reckon we could take him on with one hand tied behind our backs.

The month in VIDEO

Nostradamus

First Independent

Cert: **15**
Director: **Roger Christian**
Starring: **Tcheky Karyo, Amanda Plummer, Rutger Hauer, F Murray Abraham**
Release: **Out now (rental)**
Running time: **114 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Never judge a video by its cover. Not only does *Nostradamus's* sleeve feature a spaceship orbiting the Earth, but it also sports Rutger Hauer's name in large letters. However, between them, the spaceship and spaced-out actor are on screen for about five minutes in all.

This is a shame, seeing as anyone renting *Nostradamus* expecting some Hauer actioner is going to be disappointed, while people actually interested in this elegantly off-the-wall biography of the 16th century soothsayer will probably give it a miss. Let's hope it manages to find an audience somewhere, though, because – while it's hardly two-lagers-and-a-curry material – *Nostradamus* is never less than intriguing.

It's a rambling film, which follows the life of Michel de Nostradamus from his time as a secret jew, living in fear of the Inquisition, to his life as a confident of Catherine de Medici. As Nostradamus's power of prescience become stronger, his visions intrude into his life – Nazi tanks roll through pre-revolution French villages and he watches as nuclear war destroys industrialised cities. The vision sequences are powerfully portrayed, and the final scene, where Nostradamus predicts that humans will find paradise in the stars, is nothing short of breathtaking.

There's no getting around the problem, though, that his actual life wasn't as interesting as his predictions, leaving the biographical scenes looking a tad dull in comparison. Even de Medici comes across more as a concerned mother than a – surely more entertaining? – scheming matriarch.

Lush photography and meticulous production values help create a strong sense of period, but a bizarre mix of accents undermines some fine acting (and Hauer's mad mumbling mystic monk is a bit hard to swallow).

Overall, this is a stodgy, uneven oddity of a movie, saved by some chillingly effective and memorable images. Watch with the fast-forward button ready.

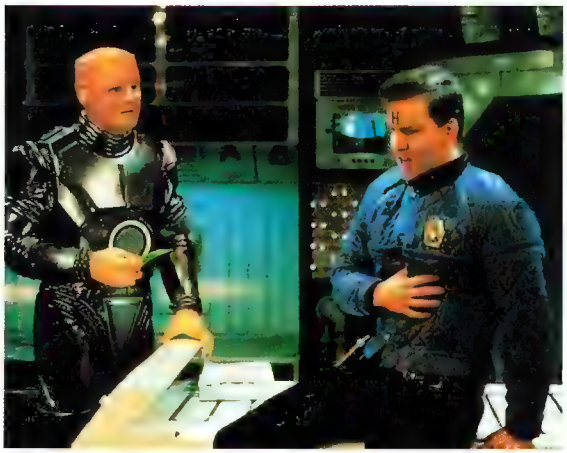
Red Dwarf 6: Byte Two

BBC Home Video

Cert: **PG**
Director: **Andy De Emmony**
Starring: **Chris Barrie, Craig Charles, Danny John-Jules**
Writers: **Doug Grant, Rob Naylor**
Release date: **Out now**
Running time: **90 mins**
Price: **£12.99**
Text: **Dan Goodleff**

Three more episodes from the much vilified six season of the *Dwarf* arrive on video, and, once again, you have to wonder what everybody was moaning about. Sure, it wasn't as good a season as some of its predecessors, but, face facts, it's still ten times funnier than the rest of the UK's current sitcom output. And what would you rather watch – the best episode of *Next of Kin* or a slightly under-par *Red Dwarf?* The gap in quality remains immense.

Admittedly, some of the ideas are a bit tired. "Emohawk" is little more than a nostalgia trip dredging up Dwane Dibbly, the heroic Rimmer and the Polymorph, while "Rimmerworld"'s tale of a planet inhabited exclusively with Rimmers is another excuse for one of the regulars to play multiple characters. And the series finale, "Out Of Time," has a very half-hearted plot in which "unreality bubbles" create a number of – yawn – alternative realities (and if you can't work out how they're going to produce another series when the crew gets killed, go to the back of the class and watch a few episodes of the new *Outer Limits* until you can see a twist coming a mile off).



Season six of *Red Dwarf* – some great jokes, but the same old plots.

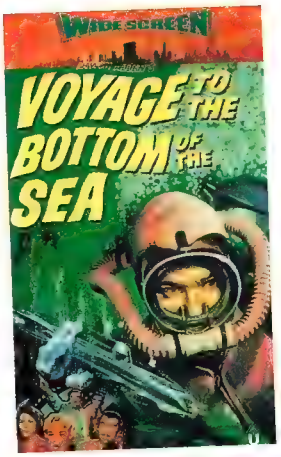
But while some of the production values are a bit of a let-down – particularly in "Out Of Time," where the make-up and special effects are occasionally so unconvincing they ruin the jokes – the model work still looks indecently impressive for the BBC, and, at the end of the day, the episodes are still very funny. And surely that's what counts.

Rimmer's theory about armies with short hair, Lister's brief life as a robot and the escape scenes in both "Rimmerworld" and "Emohawk" are classic comedy moments. Say what you like, but the laughs-per-minute ration in *Red Dwarf* is still unnaturally high.

Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea (Widescreen)

Fox Video

Cert: **U**
Director: **Irwin Allen**
Starring: **Walter Pidgeon, Joan Fontaine, Peter Lorre**
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£12.99**



Running time: **101 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Clogged up with the kind of ludicrous pseudo-science that makes *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* look like *2001*, Irwin Allen's '60s slice of sub-aqua SF hokum starts with the Earth's Van Allen belt bursting into flames. Polar ice caps melt, crops shrivel, silicon implants droop – it's an ecological disaster.

The solution? "Let it burn itself out," says one eminent scientist. "No, launch a nuclear missile," says Admiral Nelson (Walter Pidgeon). Both ideas seem flawed – and Nelson, one suspects, just wants to show off his new glass-nosed atomic sub, the Seaview, which just happens to be packed full of nuclear warheads.

It's against the wishes of the world scientific community, then, that Nelson sets off in Seaview for the Bahamas, from where (he calculates) the missile needs to be launched. On the way, the crew faces giant squids, religious fanatics, minefields, saboteurs, mutiny, and so on.

To call the characters two-dimensional would be an insult to cave paintings. Pidgeon is so unlikeable as Nelson you almost hope he *does* blow up the world, just to see the look on his face. The incredibly thin plot is propped up by an increasingly-dull series of set pieces, and the lack of a decent villain just highlights the tedious attempts at romance and friction between the crew members.

Aside from the Seaview itself, this has little in common with the subsequent TV series, which ran from 1964 to 1966. The cast is different, and even Admiral Nelson – a sort of Lorne Greene in *Battlestar Galactica*-style character on TV – is more like Captain Ahab here.

That said, this does feel more like a TV movie pilot than a real movie, and releasing it in Widescreen format gives it a dignity it really doesn't deserve.

Coming soon

TimeCop (rental) **July**
Time travel stories always throw up anomalies, but *TimeCop* has enough to fill an entire 26 year run of *Doctor Who* in less than two hours. The comic strip action, however, keeps things mindlessly entertaining. Probably the best Van Damme movie yet.

Beyond Bedlam **10 July**
Britain's answer to *Reservoir Dogs*. Well, it had to wait ages for a BBFC certification, anyway. Theme wise, it's more an SF-flavoured Brit version of *Silence of the Lambs*. Craig Fairbrass stars with Liz Hurley and Keith Allen.

Interview with the Vampire (rental) **28 July**
Sex and vampires. And more sex. And more vampires. And lashings of long hair... Androgynous Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise and Antonio Banderas star in this stylish if overlong tale of lust, blood-letting and eternal suffering.

Beyond Vision **17 July**
One of two new video labels being launched by Warner Bros, but both specialise in re-releasing classic films and TV shows, many with trailers and in Widescreen. Pick of the first bunch on the fantasy label include *Westworld* (Widescreen), *Forbidden Planet* (Widescreen) and the *Babylon 5* pilot episode.

Terror Vision **17 July**
Prime choices on Warner's new horror label include *Wolfen* (Letterbox), *The Hitcher* and *Frankenstein Unbound* (complete with trailer).

Wes Craven's Mindripper **24 August**
Aliens meets *Universal Soldier* in a film written and produced by Jonathan Craven, son of Wes.

SF Video Charts

Déjà Vu?

For the second month, ***The X-Files*** dominate the video chart, but it'll be the last time they do so for a while, because Fox won't be releasing any more until much later in the year, when it can benefit from the first terrestrial TV airing of season two on BBC 2.

So next month should see a bit more variety on the video front, particularly with Warners releasing its two new fantasy and horror labels (see "Coming soon" above). We'd put a bet on the Widescreen ***Forbidden Planet*** making an appearance, for instance. Whether any of this month's top tenners cling on for another month, however, remains to be seen...

HMV SF Top 10

1. (New) **The X-Files Box Set** Fox Video
2. (New) **The X-Files File 3** Fox Video
3. (New) **The X-Files File 4** Fox Video
4. (New) **Star Trek Deep Space Nine 3.7** CIC
5. (New) **Red Dwarf 6: Byte 2** BBC Video
6. (New) **Doctor Who: The Power of Kroll** BBC Video
7. (New) **Doctor Who: The Armageddon Factor** BBC Video
8. (New) **Angel Cop 2** Manga
9. (New) **Patlabor** Manga
10. (New) **Fantastic Voyage** Fox Video

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BOOK Reviews

"This juggling with eternity and infinity might be too much without the firm earth-anchor of Wells' Traveller, who maps the strangest futures in familiar terms of Greater London – places like Fulham or Hammersmith..."

THE TIME SHIPS

HG Wells' classic tale provides the springboard for Baxter's latest novel

Author: **Stephen Baxter**
Publisher: **HarperCollins hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 455pp**
ISBN: **0-00-224609-0**

Text: **David Langford**

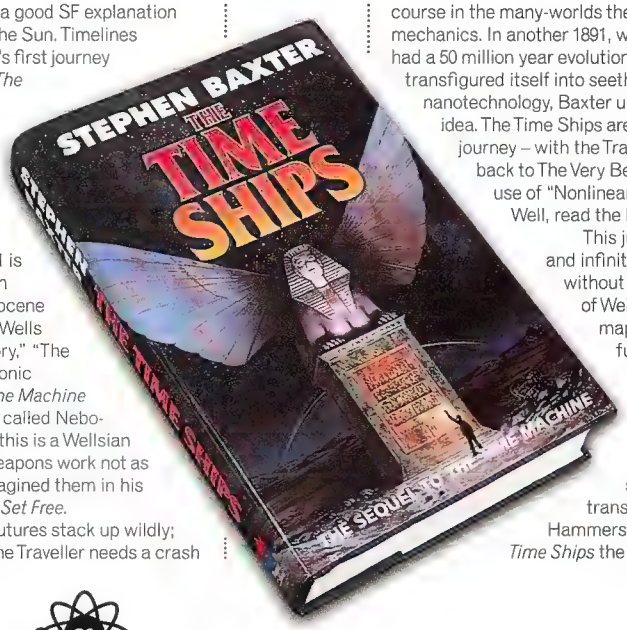
HG Wells' *The Time Machine*, published in 1895, is one of the great early classics of SF. Can a centenary sequel possibly succeed? Stephen Baxter is a brave man, and after deadly tussles with the Wells estate (which didn't approve initially), he takes the same Time Traveller on journeys which make the first book's 30 million year jaunt resemble a short stroll to the post office.

The Time Machine ended with the unnamed Traveller setting off again, never to return. Baxter reckons he hastened back to the Wellsian future of effete Eloi and cannibal Morlocks to rescue his lost Eloi friend Weena. The first of many shocks is that the future isn't what it used to be; and neither are the Morlocks. And there's a good SF explanation for the disappearance of the Sun. Timelines were changed by our man's first journey and by the publication of *The Time Machine* itself...

Travelling back to the 19th century to set things right naturally puts time further out of joint. Soon we're in a grim dystopia, a fortified London where World War 1 is still being wearily fought in 1938. Next stop, the Palaeocene period. Artful allusions to Wells abound: "The Plattner Story," "The Land Ironclads," "The Chronic Argonauts" (that early *Time Machine* draft, whose Traveller was called Nebogipfel), and more. Indeed, this is a Wellsian universe, where atomic weapons work not as we expect but as Wells imagined them in his grim 1914 novel *The World Set Free*.

Multiple pasts and futures stack up wildly; and to understand them the Traveller needs a crash course in the many-worlds theory of quantum mechanics. In another 1891, where humanity has had a 50 million year evolutionary headstart and transfigured itself into seething heaps of nanotechnology, Baxter unveils his biggest idea. The Time Ships are to make the ultimate journey – with the Traveller as passenger – back to The Very Beginning, where adroit use of "Nonlinearity Engines" will... Well, read the book.

This juggling with eternity and infinity might be too much without the firm earth-anchor of Wells' Traveller, who maps the strangest futures in terms of Greater London (location of all the Earth scenes) – engagingly describing weird structures in a transformed Fulham or Hammersmith. Early in *The Time Ships* the italics and



Respected British author Stephen Baxter throws plenty of quantum physics into his version of events.

exclamation marks are slightly overdone, admittedly, but overall Baxter writes a fair and affectionate pastiche.

And he adds neat SF *frissons* of his own too. It's particularly effective when the Traveller realises on one journey that the steady, unwobbling blur of the Sun across the sky means that in *this* timeline, the Earth's tilt has been adjusted to eliminate seasons... Or, when hurtling from a distant future where all stars have vanished into enclosing Dyson spheres, he travels far enough backward through an endless night to suddenly behold a stunning vista: "All over the sky, the stars were coming out." Take that, Arthur C Clarke!

The Time Ships is, in fact, a ripping yarn. Recommended.

A

Other "sequels" to HG Wells' *The Time Machine* include: Christopher Priest's *The Space Machine* (1976, and actually a prequel to both *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*), KW Jeter's *Morlock Night* (1979), David Lake's *The Man who Loved Morlocks* (1981), Egon Friedell's *The Return of the Time Machine* (Germany, 1946, and published in English in 1972), and Nicholas Meyer's 1979 movie *Time After Time*.

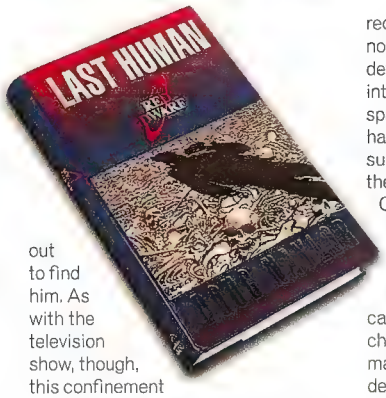
LAST HUMAN

Author: **Doug Naylor**
Publisher: **Viking hardback**
Price/page count: **£15, 310pp**
ISBN: **0-670-85255-4**

Text: **John Campbell Rees**

It's been nearly five years since the last *Red Dwarf* novel, *Better Than Life*, was published – which is kinda surprising when you think of the show's popularity. So has this follow-up been worth the wait?

In the last series, if you remember, our heroes had lost their main ship, the Red Dwarf, and were cruising about in the smaller Starbug. In *Last Human*, the action is also located on the latter ship, but for a different reason – Lister has gone missing, and the rest of the crew are out to find him. As with the television show, though, this confinement generates problems – namely that the Starbug appears to have elastic walls. Most of the time it's tiny, with limited supplies, but towards the end it mysteriously grows in stature to become quite a substantial vehicle.



Naylor's first novel gives us more insight into the characters than the TV series.

Aboard Starbug, Kryten, Rimmer and the Cat have successfully rejuvenated Lister from the universe where time ran backwards. The mission also succeeds in resurrecting Kristine Kochanski, the love of Lister's life. The Red Dwarf crew then suspend themselves in cryogenic sleep for 37 years in order to catch up with the Dwarf, but are revived early when Starbug spots a crashed Space Corp vessel. This turns out to be an alternative Starbug – the crew are in the wrong universe. While salvaging for supplies, they discover an alternative crew – dead or dying – and decide to discover what happened to this timeline's Starbug. Naturally enough, their problems are only just beginning...

Last Human has many strengths. The main characters are easily recognisable from both the earlier novels and the TV series, but better defined because you get more insight into their thoughts: Lister is still a space bum, but his more excessive bad habits are curbed; Kryten is less subservient and more devious; Rimmer the same sad act he always was; and Cat the vain creature we all know and love. Kochanski appears to have been re-introduced to make the crew work together as an effective team, instead of running from one catastrophe to the next. The supporting characters are also believable, the main villain of the novel being Lister's deranged other self. Everything that made the original Lister lovable has twisted this alter ego into a psycho.

Perhaps the best thing about *Last Human*, though, is that it's not a direct adaptation of the series. It actually works as an interesting SF novel in its own right. Like its predecessors, it takes scenes and ideas from the TV programmes and weaves them into a new version of the story. From the first page, Doug Naylor draws you into his twisting plot, and throws around enough surprises to undermine any sense that just because you've seen the series you'll know what's going to happen next. This is *Red Dwarf* painted on a broad canvas, ideas and concepts writ large in a way impossible to visualise on television. The pace is completely different from the series too, which depends on a constant stream of jokes. The addition of more sombre moments improves the tone of the whole too.

For those who still aren't sure – yes, this book *was* worth the wait.

B

SERPENT'S BLOOD

Author: **Brian Stableford**
Publisher: **Legend hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 485pp**
ISBN: **0-09-944331-7**

Text: **David Langford**

At first glance, *Serpent's Blood* looks like just another fantasy epic. After all, it's billed as the First Book of Genesys (to be followed by *Salamander's Fire* and *Chimera's Cradle*), and the action consists largely of ill-assorted groups travelling through weird and dangerous realms like the Forest of Absolute Night or the Dragomite Hills, seeking the Navel of the World...

But Brian Stableford is science fiction's Number One expert in designing exotic biosystems, and this is a carefully imagined alien world where the omnipresent Enemy is far more insidious than any Dark Lord. It is, quite simply, decay. The biosphere is riddled with multiple varieties of rot: Wood, stone, metal and even glass are all short-lived. Cities are forever under construction, forever falling apart.

The human colonists aren't quite human either. We learn that they've been gene-engineered to live in this ecosystem, with teeth that re-grow when destroyed by blight. Books and records don't last – human knowledge itself is decaying...

Okay, it sounds glum, but this story is actually exciting, colourful and witty, if a little leisurely in pace. We meet two fascinating alien races, with a third to come — not to mention grisly "chimeras," which mingle the human with the unearthly. A new sort of change is in the air too, a long-planned genetic time-bomb which may finally end this constant losing battle against decay.

After book one, the lead characters still have a long journey ahead of them – and I'm looking forward to it.

A-

A grim but witty fantasy tale, with decay the driving force behind the action.

Rian Hughes

The month in BOOKS

THE LATEST NOVELS REVIEWED, PLUS WHAT'S IN STORE AND THE TOP TEN SELLING SCI-FI/FANTASY TITLES.

Arthor

Author: **A A Attanasio**
Publisher: **Hodder & Stoughton paperback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 278pp**
ISBN: **0-340-61775-6**
Text: **Andy Butcher**

On first impressions, *Arthor* isn't a particularly appealing proposition – yet another interpretation of the legend of King Arthur by yet another author who insists on altering the spelling of a recognised character's name for no apparent reason other than to make it theirs.

Fortunately, though, first impressions can be misleading. Attanasio's version of the ancient story of Britain's mythic king blends elements of older Celtic myths with the traditional romanticised story and the author's own original ideas, and the result is surprisingly well done. *Arthor* picks up where the previous book, *The Dragon and the Unicorn*, left off, and deals with Merlin's construction of Camelot, Arthor's early encounters with Excalibur and various plots by numerous baddies. It's an epic tale, as befits its subject, and Attanasio's unusual style somehow makes sense.

He also challenges a few preconceptions – this Arthor-Arthur is not exactly all sweetness and light, but a brutal warrior who lives for little more than fighting and killing, at least to start with...

B-

Black Lightning

Author: **Mark Jones**
Publisher: **Gollancz hardback**
Price/page count: **£9.99, 299pp**
ISBN: **0-575 -5899-4**
Text: **David Langford**

The most interesting points about this technothriller are its ultra-competitive hardback price and the rather clever publicity ploy of having the nationalist Russian politician Zhirinovsky denounce it as "trashy ... full of scandal and lies."

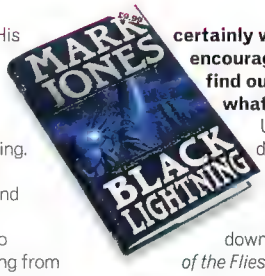
Yes, it's about big bad post-Communist Russia, itching to regroup under nationalist leadership and conquer the world. Mark Jones has worked there and has fierce views: His narrative is clotted with ostentatious research and political axe-grinding. There's also much confused action and violence, with an unkillable CIA hero surviving everything from Grievous Bodily Harm to professional execution and burial in a frozen grave. Hmm, old Rasputin would have been proud of him.

The Macguffin is Russia's secret SF weapon Molniya, which is designed to simulate a nuclear explosion's electromagnetic-pulse effects and shut down power and communications anywhere in Europe or America. What's more, Molniya is a massively fortified undersea installation, impervious to attack... And the new Russian leader, strangely resembling Zhirinovsky, plans to trigger it as a neat fireworks display to celebrate his inauguration. Things certainly look black for the West.

Things are likewise tough for the author, who has written himself into a corner and can only contrive a happy ending by introducing – in the last chapter – an artificial intelligence built into Molniya itself. A sympathetic, mind-reading superweapon with ethics! We haven't seen plot twists like this since early *Star Trek*.

Ultimately, Molniya does its stuff, but in reverse gear, and my uncertain trust in Jones's political analysis was further shaken by his truly loony ideas about thermodynamics. Disappointing.

C-



Blood Crazy

Author: **Simon Clark**
Publisher: **Hodder & Stoughton hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 343pp**
ISBN: **0-340-62574-0**
Text: **Andy Butcher**

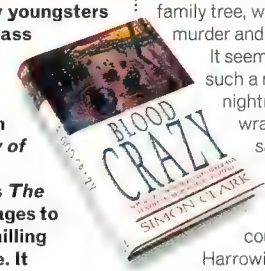
This second Simon Clark novel from Hodder & Stoughton takes the form of a journal written by 17 year old Nick Aten, and is very much divided into three parts. To start with, everybody over the age of 19 suddenly goes stark raving bonkers and starts killing off their children – or, if they don't have any of their own to play with, any youngsters that happen to pass by. By turns reminiscent of Stephen King's *The Stand*, John Wyndham's *Day of the Triffids* and James Herbert's *The Fog*, Clark manages to create quite a chilling atmosphere here. It certainly works at encouraging you to find out exactly what's going on.

Unfortunately, it's downhill from hereon in. The middle of the story gets bogged down in standard *Lord of the Flies* territory, as the surviving youngsters start to get themselves organised, and towards the end things are getting very strange indeed. Although the inevitable explanation is intriguing enough, the pacing seems a bit off – the story tends to stop and start rather alarmingly – with the conclusion coming (and then going) a little too speedily.

Despite these problems, *Blood Crazy* is an entertaining story. There's a uniquely British feel to Clark's writing that makes it stand out from the current crowd of King imitators, and you're certainly never sure what's going to happen next.

Not a book to set the horror world alight, by any means, but an enjoyable read nonetheless.

B-



The Blue Manor

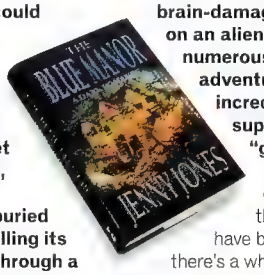
Author: **Jenny Jones**
Publisher: **Gollancz hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 352pp**
ISBN: **0-575-05818-8**
Text: **David Langford**

This strange tale of a haunted house could legitimately be called a multi-generation family saga. Although *The Blue Manor* is set in modern Essex, the family past refuses to stay buried and insists on telling its own story, first through a character's attempts at "fiction" and later when one event strikes a chord with others across the years.

Penetrating these convoluted thickets of narrative is an uneasy experience. *The Blue Manor* is troubled by multiple presences, living and dead, an unusual curse that pivots on the number three, and enigmatic links to the goddess Arianrhod. At the heart of the maze is a family tree, warped by rape, murder and incest.

It seems impossible that such a multi-stranded nightmare could be wrapped up in a satisfying way, but Jones does just that – and with a high body count too. Harrowing stuff.

B



Damned and Fancy

Author: **John Brosnan**
Publisher: **Legend paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 188pp**
ISBN: **0-09-951221-1**
Text: **Dave Golder**

The first line is: "The demon farted." Other gems later on include: "Travis could sense trouble looming ahead on the horizon like a giant smelly turd" and "Trouble is Jack's not wearing a shirt, and I know for a fact there's absolutely nothing up either of my sleeves."

If you found any of these remotely funny, you'll love *Damned and Fancy*. A kind of *Carry On Discworld*, the level of wit is stuck so far down the U-bend it rarely even raises itself up to the level of toilet humour. In other words, it's dire. Worse, there's apparently more to come. (Or is that just another dig at multi-part fantasy epics? We can but hope.)

D+

The Dragons of Heorot

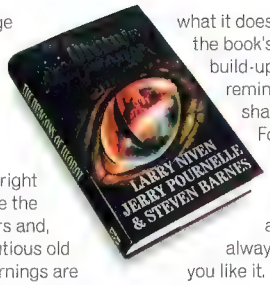
Authors: **Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle & Steven Barnes**
Publisher: **Gollancz hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 447pp**
ISBN: **0-575-05659-2**
Text: **David Langford**

This is the long-dreaded sequel to *The Legacy of Heorot*, in which a team of brain-damaged colonists on an alien planet had numerous bloodstained adventures with the incredibly violent, supercharged "grendels."

Now it's a generation later, the local uglies have been defeated and there's a whole unexplored continent out there – including not only bigger and brainier grendels but something even nastier which eats grendels alive and can reduce humans to littered bones at fast-forward speed. It seems a tactical error to make a mystery of this new killer and to defer the explanation for well over 200 pages (littered with the occasional huge hint), when the answer proves to be exactly what any SF reader would have guessed ages before.

Slightly more interesting are the colony's inner tensions. The bright youngsters are highly aware that the first colonists suffered IQ damage while frozen for the interstellar voyage ("ice on their minds"), and thus dangerously overconfident. Certainly, the wrinklies wouldn't approve of

hair-raising teenage initiations involving live grendels.... As one might have predicted from Jerry Pournelle's involvement, the bright kids underestimate the continent's dangers and, ultimately, the cautious old military guru's warnings are proved well founded.



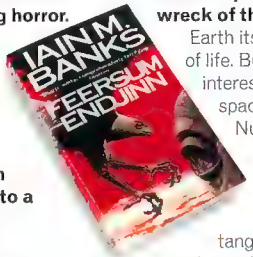
Dragons lumbers along pleasantly enough, with regular hotspots of action and a conclusion offering new hope for the colony's future. But somehow it doesn't quite cohere, as though the three authors were pulling in different directions and wasting energy that should have gone into the narrative. Pure train-journey reading.

C+

Feersum Endjinn

Author: **Iain M Banks**
Publisher: **Orbit paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 279pp**
ISBN: **1-85723-273-9**
Text: **David Langford**

This is high-concept SF, and no mistake. There is a castle so vast that entire cities are built in its rooms and chandeliers; a place where, for excellent but almost forgotten reasons, the central tower rises beyond the atmosphere (a problem for the poor sod who ends up having to climb it). Its interstices hold a raging, chaotic electronic afterlife called the crypt, infested with giant raptors and a flayed, gibbering horror. Characters die many times. Far above, an encroaching dustcloud threatens to swallow the Sun and bring Earth to a frozen, lightless end. Gosh!



To complicate matters further, one narrative strand is related by the youthful crypt-communicator Bascule the Teller, hu rites lik nijel moalswurth onli wurse (on akownt uv disleksia) & u need 2 reed ded slo 4 it 2 mayk eni sens @ orl... After a while this becomes quite fun, and the plot marches on.

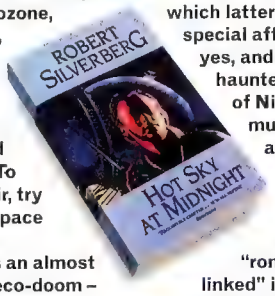
One favourite trick of both Iain Banks and his SF alter-ego Iain M. Banks is to conceal a booby-trap at the heart of the story, so that when you've unpeeled the final layer of his narrative onion something goes "sproing" in your face and rearranges everything that has gone before. One shattering example being *Use of Weapons*. Here the surprise is a double-cross: The final paragraphs in which Bascule names the feersum endjinn and reveals what it does are - after all the book's tantalising build-up – feersumly reminiscent of a shaggy-dog story. Fooled again! Iain M. Banks is a brilliant conjuror and he always makes you like it.

B+

Hot Sky at Midnight

Author: **Robert Silverberg**
Publisher: **HarperCollins paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 388pp**
ISBN: **0-586-21108-X**
Text: **David Langford**

Well into the 21st century, our precious planet is a mess for all the usual reasons – global warming, stripped-away ozone, diseased water, and an atmosphere polluted with sulphur compounds and hydrocarbons. To breathe good air, try a holiday on a space habitat. Robert Silverberg sees an almost cheery side to eco-doom – the dance band madly playing as the Titanic goes down. With grim humour, he shows people behaving in believably human ways, having stormy affairs, playing megacorporation politics, cutting deals to make a quick buck from the wreck of the world.



Earth itself still has a lease of life. But the fate of the interesting "sanctuary" space-colony Valparaiso Nuevo offers a parable of things to come, with disaster emerging from a chance tangle of greed, sex, politics, distrust and incompetence. It's the cock-up rather than the conspiracy theory of history. Some intriguing SF touches are included too – notably, a blind man who isn't blind.

Silverberg's plotting is a neat piece of craftsmanship by one of the most fluent writers in the business. There are no real novelties, but it reads well. Two partial, compromise solutions to the global mess emerge: Genetic remodelling and a new space technology. So *Hot Sky* ends on a semi-optimistic note... But Silverberg would probably agree that neither answer carries the same conviction as the original question. Are we already too far down the path to an Earth that can't sustain human life? No-one knows. Read, enjoy – and worry...

B

Nightrider

Author: **Sheila Holligon**
Publisher: **Creed paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 320pp**
ISBN: **0-451-18330-4**
Text: **John Grant**

Thirtysomething London photographer Rose inherits from her estranged father a remote cottage somewhere in the wilds of Yorkshire. Arriving for a few weeks to escape obligations to her current boyfriend Edward, she soon discovers her sole neighbours: the farming Bransdale family, comprising battle-axe mother, hunky elder son Jack, incestuous younger children Paddy and Maggie, for which latter Rose feels a special affinity... Oh, yes, and the cottage is haunted by the spirit of Nicholas Brett, a murderous seeker after eternal life who's been cursed by a witch. Rose becomes "romantically linked" in reasonably graphic detail with Jack, briefly with a visiting Edward, almost with Maggie (who proves to be her half-sister) and repeatedly with the shade of nasty Nicholas, who satisfies her like what no mortal man ever could.

This is a real visit to *Cold Comfort Farm* territory – only the self-congratulatory asterisks are missing – and to a fair number of other territories as well, notably *Wuthering Heights*, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Mistress Crowl's Ghost* and, at a guess, Jonathan Aycliffe's *The Vanishment* (a far creepier book). As a fantasy, this seems extraordinarily derivative – there is no sense here of a tale yearning to be told – but as an erotic novel, it's rather more successful. It would be one of the better entrants to the *Black Lace* list, for instance.

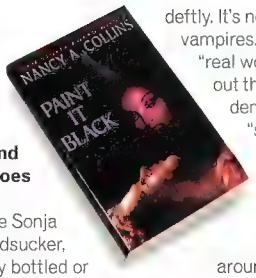
The chimney-sweeping scene – with he-man Jack thrusting his stiff rod progressively further up the resistant passage – is a classic of its type.

B

Paint It Black

Author: **Nancy A Collins**
Publisher: **NEL paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 253pp**
ISBN Number: **0-450-61010-1**
Text: **David Langford**

The young vampire with limitless cool and street-cred (fangs in the disco, mirrorshades after dark) is already a horror cliché. But any cliché can come to life when an author puts energy into it, and Nancy Collins does just that.



Our anti-heroine Sonja is a reluctant bloodsucker, often drinking only bottled or animal blood. Crazed with hatred for the vampire-lord who initiated her, she spends her days hunting and killing others of her kind. But she's also crazed in a deeper sense, haunted and taunted by the blood-hungry "Other" in her own mind — who breaks loose when Sonja attempts an ordinary relationship with a boyfriend... This is a sequel, but the background is painted in deftly. It's not just us and vampires. There's a whole "real world" of night-life out there, with ogres, demons, succubi and "seraphim" all passing as human (one witty snapshot has a Hasidic jeweller carrying valuables around New York with a Golem as his personal bodyguard). Naturally, too, there are vampire S/M sex clubs, where adoring human groupies or "renfields" – see *Dracula* – are fitted with taps which enable blood to be drawn off into elegant crystal glasses.

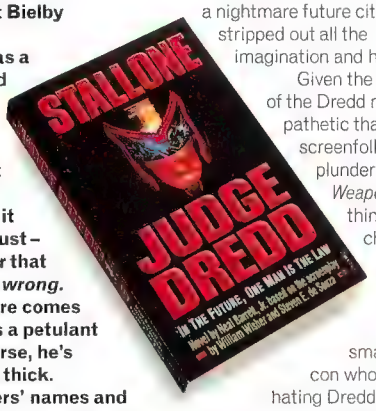
Sonja stalks through minefields of eroticism and violence to a final, spectacular confrontation. Meanwhile, a mysterious real world subplot is working itself out, hinting at an eventual end to the cycle of vampiric predation... Not for the squeamish.

B+

Judge Dredd

Author: **Neal Barrett Jr. (based on the screenplay by William Wisher and Steven E de Souza)**
Publisher: **Boxtree paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 279 pp**
ISBN: **0-7522-0661-3**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

Rarely has a book riled me so much. It's not even that it's badly written – it gets by, just – but rather that it's all so *wrong*. Dredd here comes across as a petulant child. Worse, he's painfully thick. Characters' names and personalities have been changed for no reason (Junior Angel becoming Junior Head-Dead – why?), and little use has been made of the incredible locations (Mega City One, for Grud's sake – what a gift!) or villains made famous by the comic's lauded 18 year history. It doesn't even do much as a straight action story with futuristic overtones, which is what the screenwriters appear to have reduced the whole thing to. Dredd hardly does a heroic thing or has any snappy lines. I'm getting very depressed now...



Of course, it could just be that I'm a sad Dredd fan – the sort who insists the Judge never takes his helmet off but I don't think so. With Tim Burton's first *Batman* movie – and I'm not Burton's biggest fan, believe me – plenty of *Batman* stuff got messed around with, but it remained true to the spirit of the original. I'm not sure this does. If this novelisation's anything to go by, everything's been reduced to the level of a basic Hollywood stereotype – from *2000AD* the creators have taken the basic idea of ultra-hard cops policing a nightmare future city, and stripped out all the imagination and humour.

Given the strength of the Dredd mythos, it's pathetic that the screenfolk had to plunder *Lethal Weapon 2*, of all things, for the character of Dredd's sidekick Fergie, a weasily small time con who starts off hating Dredd but – get this! – ends up working alongside him. It's also awful that they've seen fit to have Judge Hershey and (or is this just my warped imagination?) father of the law Judge Fargo secretly fancy the emotionless Dredd (in fact, he's not *that* emotionless – he seems to spend half the book blubbing about how the law's failed him or some such thing). And it's absolutely unforgivable that the plot should be packed with so many gaping holes.

Of course, it's unfair to judge a film on the strengths of its novelisation. From a hack job like this you get no sense of the effects shots of Mega City One, the impressive production designs, or set-piece action scenes. Let's hope all three are going to be top notch, then, because otherwise *Batman Forever's* going to kick Dredd's ass.

D+

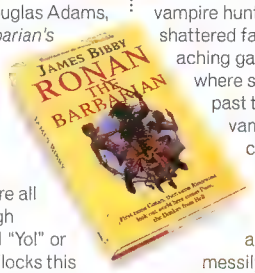
Ronan the Barbarian

Author: **James Bibby**
Publisher: **Millennium hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 224pp**
ISBN: **1-85798-282-7**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

Judging a book by its cover is not a recommended pastime, and here's a case in point. Everything about this dust-jacket screams out "Avoid!" – dodgy painting, crap title, immature blurb and obligatory comparison to Pratchett. The first 40 pages or so of prologue – entitled "Book One" – lives down to the dust jacket's promise too. It's badly written, tedious and desperately unfunny. But then something decidedly odd happens...

The story actually starts to get quite good. By the end, I was rather enjoying it, and even laughing at some of the jokes. The characters develop nicely, particularly Ronan's partying sidekick Tarl, and the plot comes to a satisfying climax – quite a feat considering the bog standard find-magical-sword-defeat-sworn-enemy quest storyline.

It's not a classic by any means, and most of the best jokes are rather cheekily lifted from Python or Douglas Adams, but *Ronan the Barbarian's* a step above most other contemporary "humorous fantasy." Interestingly, the main characters are all black too – although apart from the odd "Yo!" or reference to dreadlocks this seems largely irrelevant. The narrative's condemnation of zombies, wraiths and werewolves as "trash," however, is less than racially tolerant...



With a decent cover, and the prologue reduced to a three-page plot precis, this could just about have earned itself a B- or even (on a good day) a B. But former TV comedy writer James Bibby could be a name to watch if he can find something more original to write about...

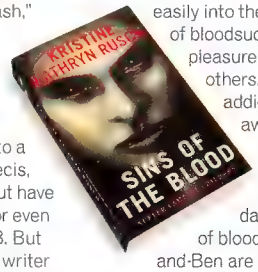
C+

Sins of the Blood

Author: **Kristine Kathryn Rusch**
Publisher: **Millennium paperback**
Price/page count: **£8.99, 357pp**
ISBN: **1-85798-450-1**
Text: **David Langford**

It's vampires again, but with (another) different spin. Here, vampirism is openly recognised in the USA as an addiction or mental disease – and most folks' attitude is: "Who cares about addicts? They're street people. Not anyone I know..."

Kristine Kathryn Rusch writes powerfully and disturbingly from two warped viewpoints. Cammie the vampire hunter comes from a shattered family and has aching gaps of memory where she's blocked out past terrors. Here, vampirism links all too convincingly with child abuse – and imagine the trauma of seeing a vampire parent die messily with a stake through the heart? Meanwhile, nice college boy Ben is "coming out." And he slides easily into the horrific delights of bloodsucking, a hot sensual pleasure which exceeds all others. But, like a crack addict, he's drifting away from the human race.



This is potent, visceral stuff, a dangerous cocktail of blood and sex. Cammie and Ben are on a collision course dictated by their own suppressed past. It has to end in flames.

But the setting has weaknesses. America's laid-back attitude to the Vampire Problem makes it incredible that Wisconsin, of all states, should have legalised vampire-killing – not even by the Army or police, but by self-appointed paramedics. Elsewhere, apparently, the worst cops can inflict on vampires is a painful dose of sunlight (the equivalent of "The prisoner fell downstairs, guv") before releasing them. It makes you wonder what's happened to the laws covering sexual assault and murder.

Rusch's foreground is compelling, so if you can ignore the few background quibbles it's a shivery, queasy read.

B-

Spanky

Author: **Christopher Fowler**
Publisher: **Warner paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 338pp**
ISBN: **0-7515-0699-0**
Text: **David Langford**

Spanky is a charismatic daemon who steps into the life of the non-hero Martyn Ross. Martyn, frankly, is a wimp – a whining no-hoper in a dead-end job. He's fascinated, however, by Spanky's offer of a magical self-improvement course to tackle his abject lack of money, prospects, girlfriends and dress sense.

Half the book duly shows Martyn being boosted to suavity and confidence. Much of this is witty, as in the scene where he finally gets laid by a sexy model – with Spanky invisibly present and offering helpful but unappreciated advice. Already, though, there are hints of the darkness to come – to improve Martyn's career, for instance, a rival for promotion must be "accidentally" crippled.

We know what must follow. Spanky's assistance seems freely offered, but eventually the horrifying bill is presented. Refusal leads to a catalogue of punishment for trying to bilk a daemon, and it's related with horrid zest. Edge-of-the-seat stuff.

B+

Star Wars: The Original Radio Drama

Author: **Brain Daley**
Publisher: **Titan**
Price/page count: **£7.99, 346pp**
ISBN: **1-85286-628-4**
Text: **Dave Golder**

It's the book of the radio play of the film. As opposed to the book of the film. Or the film of the radio play. Or the smoke signals of the tribal drums. Or whatever.

Star Wars: The Original Radio Drama reprints the original script that formed the basis of a 13-part radio drama broadcast in the USA back in 1980. Because it's presented in the form of a script, it's more hard going than a normal novel. And I can't see too many wanting to produce the play themselves. But what might, at first glance, seem to be yet another way of wringing a few more dollars out of the *Star Wars* licence actually turns out to be quite an interesting tome.

For a start, as it points out in the foreword by the author of the original script, there were only about 27 minutes of dialogue in the entire film of *Star Wars*, whereas the radio play was six hours of drama which couldn't resort to flashy special effects. The result is you get a lot more insight into the main characters. And since the play has never been released commercially in the UK (it's only ever been available on import CD) most of this material will be new to UK fans. Indeed some of it is even new to US fans, because this is the original script – before it was edited for broadcast.

In other words, there's a lot of new plot here. And it's all sanctioned by the Great Lord Lucas himself as fitting in with his vision of the *Star Wars* universe. So now we can discover how close Han came to backing out of his agreement with Luke and Ben Kenobi, more about Vader's interrogation of Leia and how Luke almost writes off an airhopper in a race.

It doesn't quite come off as reading material – it's not a novel, after all – but if you have more than a passing interest in the *Star Wars* myth (i.e. you're a fan) then the extra insight this radio script provides will be an invaluable source of trivia.

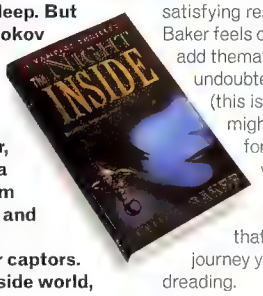
B-

The Night Inside

Author: **Nancy Baker**
Publisher: **Creed paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 312pp**
ISBN: **0-45-118327-4**
Text: **John Grant**

Two out of three research history postgrads moonlighting in Toronto for a commercial operation are murdered, and the third, Ardeth, is distraught – but no more – until the Bad Guys come for her as well.

However, instead of killing their victim, they decide to feed her to the object of all this secrecy, a 500-plus year old vampire called Rozokov, who's been disinterred from a decades-long sleep. But Ardeth and Rozokov ally and, realising that the only means of escape is for her, too, to become a vampire, perform the necessary – and wreak dreadful revenge on their captors. Once in the outside world, Rozokov abandons her so that he might discover the ultimate perpetrator of these crimes against decent, liberal vampire folk, while Ardeth must discover for herself a vampiric modus vivendi appropriate to 20th-century Toronto. Eventually reunited, the loving pair exact vengeance on the tyrannical magnate responsible for all their woes.



Expanded from a longish story, "Cold Sleep" (in the anthology Northern Frights, 1992), this is hardly an original contribution to the vampire subgenre – there's a comfortable familiarity about each new page where one would prefer discomfort. Nevertheless, it's an exceptionally well-wrought thriller, eventually gathering itself to a genuinely exciting and satisfying resolution. Once Baker feels confident enough to add thematic ambition to her undoubted tale-telling skills (this is her first novel), she might well become a force to be reckoned with. In the interim, here's an ideal page-turner for that long train journey you were dreading.

D+

Ed Wood

Authors: **Scott Alexander & Larry Karaszewski**
Publisher: **Faber & Faber**
Price/page count: **£7.99, 170pp**
ISBN: **0-571-17568-6**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

This screenplay of the new Tim Burton film (see review on page 76) is a typically tasteful publication from the Faber brothers. There's an introduction by the authors, explaining the film's genesis, and a few hilarious short scenes which never made it to the screen, such as Ed's brief first marriage and what happened when he met Tor Johnson's family...

You can certainly see why Burton jumped at the script and filmed it largely as written. The characters virtually leap off the page, although it certainly helps to hear the words in the voices of Depp, Steele, etc. And Scott and Karaszewski are the sort of writers who make their stage directions just as witty as their dialogue. There's really very little to criticise here. If you liked the movie, this is a wonderful way to relive it. And if you're even remotely interested in screenwriting, here's an excellent example of How To Do It. Fans of Ed Wood, Depp or Burton will love this, and so – I suspect – will a lot of other people.

D+

The Terminal Experiment

Author: **Robert J Sawyer**
Publisher: **NEL paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 328pp**
ISBN: **0-340-63233-2**
Text: **David Langford**

Robert Sawyer, a relative newcomer to SF novels, has an interesting technique of taking familiar plot devices and smashing them together in dense, exciting showers of sparks. Here, there's the old notion that super-sensitive EEG scanners might detect an electromagnetic pattern that defines humanity and leaves the body at death: The "soulwave." Hence much social and theological upheaval (pro- and anti-abortion movements are convulsed by the measurability of just when a foetus acquires a soul). The possible implication of an afterlife soon inspires soulwave discoverer Peter Hobson to have three computer simulations of himself set up, to see whether he could survive as an immortal or a creature of pure intellect.

Meanwhile, a mass of hotly emotional material about Peter's marriage (which at first seems novelistic padding, but later proves itself highly relevant) complicates matters. Peter can't bring himself to hurt the rotter who seduced his wife, but at least one of his disembodied alter-egos can. And you can get almost anything through the Internet, including hired assassins...

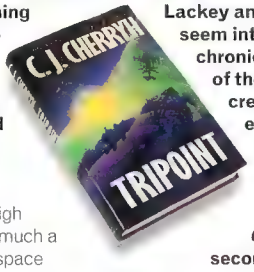
B+

Tripoint

Author: **CJ Cherryh**
Publisher: **Hodder & Stoughton hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 377pp**
ISBN: **0-340-63829-X**
Text: **Dan Abnett**

Voyaging once more into the fictional milieu she first established in *Downbelow Station*, CJ Cherryh proves beyond any doubt that she's perfected the talent of taking old plots from salty-sea-dog pirate chests and then reconditioning them with matt-finish SF terminology in place of the old, hand-waxed furniture.

And it works a treat. *Tripoint* is a superior slice of high adventure; not so much a space opera as a space shanty. Emotive and passionate, it concerns an act of lustful cruelty long past, but not forgotten. It's also a story of personal conflict, commercial rivalry and blood feuds that could well have taken place in a particularly action-packed episode of *The Onedin Line*.



Cherryh's great merchant starships are family businesses, crewed and owned by large, extended clans. Some 20 years before the action outlined in the book, the daughter of one ship-clan was abused and raped by a young rake from a rival vessel. Now, at Viking Station, the two ships, the two crews and the two histories encounter each other again for the first time, and the son sired by the violent union, now a young man, is caught up in the middle.

The intrigue is fierce, and the characters strongly and firmly drawn, if a little grim and intense. Cherryh's future is not a funny place. But what she seems to capture best of all is the burn and sting of family ties and the uncompromising thickness of blood.

She does, however, leave a lot to the imagination at times – you can go for pages without sighting a visual description – and the cleaned down, controversial narrative means you sometimes have to take a second run-up at the more verb-less prose. But it's got a good, credible feel, and it's admirably light on upset-Scrabble alien names.

B

The White Gryphon

Author: **Mercedes Lackey & Larry Dixon**
Publisher: **Millennium hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 305pp**
ISBN: **1-85798-430-7**
Text: **Andy Butcher**

One of the biggest problems with successful fantasy stories seems to be the inhuman attraction they have for their authors. Not content with penning ten books set in the "present" of their Valdemar setting, Lackey and Dixon now seem intent on chronicling the history of the world they've created, often in excruciating (and not particularly interesting) detail. *The White Gryphon* is the second book in a trilogy dealing with (and the many consequences of) The Mage Wars of Valdemar's torrid past.

After the rather climactic events of the wars themselves, a band of survivors have travelled far to the south and constructed a city in which to rebuild their futures. Of course, such a situation would be far too mundane on its own, so things are spiced up a bit by a psychopathic misogynist and the arrival of a delegation from a southern King. The King's messengers c aim that the city is being built on royal land, and the refugees will have to move on. To sort things out, the leaders travel south to meet his Kingliness. Everything goes well until people start dying in mysterious ways, and then there's a race against time to find the culprit.

The White Gryphon is something of an oddity for a fantasy story – very little that's fantastic actually happens. The main plot is a murder-mystery, and a great deal of time is spent investigating the personalities of the various characters. The gryphons themselves are completely human in outlook and perspective, with only the odd wing or claw reference thrown in for "colour." There's nothing really wrong with the writing, as such – the style is the problem. It's all quite dull and mundane. Although I'm sure fans will lap this up, it certainly won't encourage anyone else to read the rest of the series.

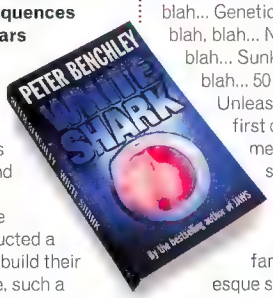
C

White Shark

Author: **Peter Benchley**
Publisher: **Arrow paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 324pp**
ISBN: **0-09-949161-3**
Text: **Tim Norris**

Peter Benchley's latest novel returns to the winning formula of his first *(Jaws)*, except that this time the seaside terror is (despite the title) even more sinister than a killer shark. It's the usual "Bad things happen, but no-one knows what's going on (not even the reader), one man suspects, no one believes him, crisis, danger, crash, bang, wallop, and they all live happily ever after" kind of thing, but with a sci-fi twist.

So what is it that causes all this kerfuffle? Well, the back cover pretty much gives it away ("World War 2... Blah, blah... Genetic experiment... blah, blah... Nazis... Blah, blah... Sunk U-boat... Blah, blah... 50 years later... Unleashed...") and the first couple of chapters merely confirm your suspicions. Thereafter you're plonked straight into familiar Benchley-esque sea-yarn territory.



But while Benchley can still spin a damn good tale, his characters are a bit thin and somehow it all seems a little hollow. You're compelled to read not because of the excitement of the hunt (there isn't one), or the tension and anxiety cranked up by the creature's activities (it always kills people and things I didn't know or care about), but to find out more about the creature itself. I had a pretty good idea what it was, and I wanted to know more about it. What did it look like? How did it come to be? What could be learned from it?

Sadly, none of these issues were explored, and I was left thinking that the novel might just as well have been about a white shark after all. Heigh ho.

C-

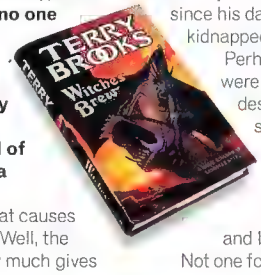
Witches' Brew

Author: **Terry Brooks**
Publisher: **Legend hardback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 304pp**
ISBN: **0-09-960311-X**
Text: **David Langford**

It's ages since I read and puked at Terry Brooks' execrable Tolkien rip-off *The Sword of Shannara*. Nearly two decades later, he still sells, and it's time to investigate once again just what it is about his books that make them so popular...

This is the fifth in Terry Brooks' "Magic Kingdom of Landover" series, and it leans frequently and annoyingly on irrelevant past events. There are several references to a dark fairy called the Gorse, who did vile things in a previous book, for example, but who has nothing to do with the plot.

What is the plot? Ben Holiday rules this Magic Kingdom which he bought in book one. An invader pops up and announces that he'll invade unless Ben agrees to fight, in turn, seven magical champions. In true fantasy hero fashion (and since his daughter's been kidnapped), Ben agrees.



Perhaps earlier books were better, but here, despite energetic fight scenes, Landover seems a thin creation, filled with cardboard characters and bad jokes. Not one for re-reading.

D

Coming soon

Rose Madder Special Edition
Hodder & Stoughton **1-6 July**
If you want to get hold of this Stephen King effort, you're either going to have to fly abroad or spend £100. Y'see, just 250 special gold embossed, signed copies will be made available, and only at airports. For the moment, at least.

Insomnia
New English Library **20 July**
Paperback
King's latest gore-fest released in paperback. A 26-hour audio version will be made available for £49.

World War: Tilting the Balance
New English Library **20 July**
Paperback
The second volume of Harry Turtledove's alternative history of World War 2.

Pacific Edge
Harper Collins **24 July**
Paperback
Kim Stanley Robinson's third visit to Orange County.

The X-Files: Whirlwind
HarperCollins **24 July**
Paperback
The second and final *X-Files* book by Charles Grant, who allegedly parted company with the US publishers rather abruptly after its completion. Did he go or was he pushed? Call in Scully and Mulder!

The Making of Highlander
Boxtree **31 July**
Paperback
Covering both the films and the TV series, Gary Gillies and David Basson's guide details all episodes, plus interviews and behind-the-scenes photos.

Vanitas
Gollancz **July**
Hardback
The third Timmy Valentine novel by SP Somtow has the vampire rock star going on a world tour more bloody than an Alice Cooper gig.

Best-selling SF Books

Children Knock Off Pratchett!

Blimey, would you Adam 'n' Eve it? Pratchett not at number one shock! And knocked off by yet another entry in the ***Star Wars*** saga! Yet more impressive is the fact that the only surviving title from last month's Top 10 is the ***Babylon 5*** novel – fans obviously want to pick up as many clues about JM Straczynski's five-year plan as is humanly possible...

The Forbidden Planet SF Book Chart

1. **Star Wars: Children of the Jedi** Barbara Hambley (Transworld)
2. **Soul Music** Terry Pratchett (Transworld)
3. **World War in Balance** Harry Turtledove (Hodder & Stoughton)
4. **Power Play** Anne McCaffrey (Transworld)
5. **The White Gryphon** Mercedes Lackey (Millennium)
6. **Babylon 5: Voices** John Vornholt (Boxtree)
7. **The X-Files: Goblins** Charles Grant (HarperCollins)
8. **Everville** Clive Barker (HarperCollins)
9. **Predator: Concrete Jungle** Nathan Archer (Millennium)
10. **Last Human** Grant Naylor (Viking)

COMIC Reviews

"The most impressive of the existing monthly *Star Wars* titles is *Dark Empire 2*, which has just come to the end of its run."

Star Wars: Dark Empire 2
Publisher: **Dark Horse Comics**
Writer: **Tom Veitch**
Artist: **Cam Kennedy**
Issues: **1-6**
Price: **£1.85**

B+

Droids: Rebellion
Publisher: **Dark Horse Comics**
Writer: **Ryder Windham**
Artist: **Ian Gibson**
Issues **1-2**
Price: **£1.50**

C-

Jabba The Hutt: The Gaar Suppoon Hit
Publisher: **Dark Horse Comics**
Writer: **Jim Woodring**
Artists: **Art Wetherell & Monty Sheldon**
Issue: **1**
Price: **£1.50**

C

Classic Star Wars: A New Hope
Publisher: **Boxtree**
Writer: **Roy Thomas**
Artist: **Howard Chaykin**
Price: **£8.99**

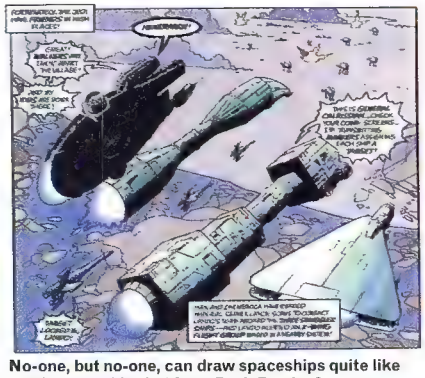
B-

Classic Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back
Publisher: **Boxtree**
Writer: **Archie Goodwin**
Artist: **Al Williamson**
Price: **£8.99**

C

Classic Star Wars: Return of the Jedi
Publisher: **Boxtree**
Writer: **Archie Goodwin**
Artist: **Al Williamson**
Price: **£8.99**

C



No-one, but no-one, can draw spaceships quite like our Cam, as this shot from Dark Empire 2 proves.

STAR WARS

Dark Horse hopes you're looking for more Star Wars

Text: **Matt Bielby**

Great though plenty of *Star Wars* comic adaptations and spin-offs are, you can't help wondering if we're seeing a bit of overkill here. Is there really an audience for the sheer number of titles out there at the moment, especially now Jabba the Hutt (of all "people") is getting his own regular series, and the new comic starring bit-part character Wedge is all set to appear?

The most impressive of the existing monthly titles is *Dark Empire 2*, which has just come to the end of its run, although a *Dark Empire 3* is pretty much a cert. Set a good few years after the events in *Return of the Jedi*, it's a big, sweeping drama featuring all the major *Star Wars* characters, plus a number of new ones, and boasting some spectacular artwork from ex-*Judge Dredd* and *Rogue Trooper* artist Cam Kennedy. His depictions of Luke, Leia and so on only look vaguely like the film characters, but his sense of composition, colour, locations – and hardware in particular – is spot on. Nobody draws spaceships like Cam Kennedy. The writing can be a bit stilted at times – too often the captions are left to explain what's going on – but this is still quality stuff.

The *Star Wars* droids, C3PO and R2-D2, have already had a number of mini-series based around them, all gentle, comic adventure romps, fairly amusing, but fairly forgettable too. *Rebellion* is no different, and although it boasts nice cartoony artwork from another ex-*Dredd* artist, Ian Gibson, it remains too slight to really recommend. And this isn't Gibson's best work either – he does a competent job, but appears to be coasting more than anything.

The idea of a comic starring intergalactic mob-boss and Han Solo nemesis Jabba the Hutt might seem a terrible one, but as a one-shot *The Gaar Suppoon Hit* works rather well. The whole thing basically consists of slug-like Jabba and a rival crime boss sitting in a room together and double, triple, then quadruple-crossing each other. There's some snappy dialogue, and a few good twists, but it's hard to see how they're going to work a series around this guy. Still, I'm intrigued.

Dark Empire 2, Dark Horse's most prestigious project...

...while the Jabba books seem to be really just extended jokes...

...and the Droids comics light-hearted romps.

Meanwhile, here in the UK, Boxtree has just reprinted the original comic adaptations of the three *Star Wars* movies as colour graphic novels. Each one sticks to the plot of its respective film closely, and is a quality job, with good art (Al Williamson's precise line work in the second two volumes depicts the look of the movies particularly well), and, of course, strong, readable storylines.

The pick of the trio is, however, the first book. Not only does the original *Star Wars* have, arguably, the strongest storyline of the three, but it's the only one originally written to be read in large chunks – the others look like they've been adapted from newspaper strips and are rather stilted and wordy. *A New Hope* also has historic curiosity value - written by Roy Thomas from the film script before the movie actually came out, it features a handful of scenes that were snipped from the actual movie to keep the running time down.

The only fly in the ointment is Boxtree's slightly shoddy presentation. The paper and printing are fine, but otherwise these are real bash-it-out jobs. There are no introductions, no flyleafs, and no explanations to go with the Ralph McQuarrie pre-production drawings at the back of each title. Indeed, the only way you can tell who wrote or drew what is from the lists of surnames on the covers. My black-and-white Sphere paperback edition of the *A New Hope* material (75p back in 1978!) features introductions by both Stan Lee and Roy Thomas, a bunch of excellent pin-ups, and the original Marvel comic-book covers ("Enter: Luke Skywalker! Will he save the galaxy – or destroy it?" reads the first).

What a shame Boxtree couldn't have managed something similar...

TALES OF THE MARVELS: BLOCKBUSTER

Publisher: **Marvel Select**
Writer: **Mike Baron**
Artist: **Shawn Martinbrough**
Issue: **1**
Price: **£3.70**

Text: **Matt Bielby**

Marvel Comics gets few critical hits these days, so last year's *Marvels* mini-series must have been very welcome indeed. It was a clever concept in a number of ways – it got the nostalgia vote by retelling important moments from early Marvel Comics history (the death of Spider-Man's girlfriend Gwen Stacey; the first battle between the Fantastic Four and the world-devouring Galactus) from the point of view of normal mortals observing, and occasionally caught up in, the incredible events; it introduced a couple of important talents in writer Kurt Busiek and artist Alex Ross, who somehow managed to convince us that if superheroes actually did exist, this is what they'd look like; and provided the lushest packaging yet (including, of all things, a transparent plastic cover) enabling Marvel to charge the unprecedented price of $5.95 for 46 pages of story.

Naturally, Marvel was bound to repeat the process, this time in a series of similarly packaged 48-page one-shots entitled *Tales of the Marvels*. The first one, *Blockbuster*, features a different creative

Shawn Martinbrough is a talented artist, but his Silver Surfer doesn't quite manage to convince.

team to the original series, but takes the same basic tack. During a battle between the Silver Surfer and some bad guy called Tyros the Terrible in a *Fantastic Four* comic over 20 years ago, a city block got wrecked – an event completely glossed over in the comic at the time.

Blockbuster returns to that moment, and follows the repercussions of the damage – emotional and physical – on a few survivors. The Surfer appears a couple of times, but most of the story deals with normal people who are struggling with their loss, rebuilding their lives, harbouring desires for revenge and so on. All well and good, and decently handled, but also strangely uninvolving. I didn't really care very much what happened to any of these people, and it was a bit of a struggle to get to the end.

And while Shawn Martinbrough is talented painter, he's no Ross. The Silver Surfer doesn't look real here, more like a slightly blurred version of the original character, thus robbing the whole proceedings of at least 50% of its appeal. Not a bad buy, then, but far too expensive, and a step backwards from the old series. Marvel needs to do better if it's not going to kill the Golden Goose this time.

8

The month in COMICS

THE LATEST COMIC BOOKS REVIEWED, PLUS WHAT'S IN THE PIPELINE AND CHART NEWS.

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

Marvel Comics

Writer: **Peter David**
Artists: **Liam Sharp with Robin Riggs & John Holdredge**
Issue: **431**
Price: **£1.25**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

***Hulk:* Liam Sharp draws the most outrageous musclemen this side of Bisley.**

For the past few years, *The Incredible Hulk* has been one of Marvel's few regular titles worth looking at, down mainly to writer Peter David's tight, clever plotting and great dialogue. For much of the run, the art was handled by Brit team Gary Frank and Cam Smith, whose clean, expressive Alan Davis-like work provided a pleasant relief from the testosterone-pumped style that seems to dominate most superhero comics of the moment.

Recently, however, Liam Sharp has taken over, and he provides perhaps the most pumped up characters this side of Simon Bisley, although with enough of his own style to keep the comic looking interesting. Indeed, the tight inking is reminiscent of Brian Bolland, of all people, which makes for a refreshing change.

There's nothing particularly clever about the plot – old enemy The Abomination turns up, although this time in the role of put-upon innocent, and the Hulk reluctantly gets into a fight with him – but it's been done nicely, is paced well, and proffers a couple of good jokes. It'll be interesting to see what happens next...

8

***The Odyssey*: Has Tank Girl's time been and gone? We're starting to think so...**

...especially considering just how hard going the *Tank Girl 2* collection has become.

TANK GIRL: THE ODYSSEY

DC/Vertigo

Writer: **Peter Milligan**
Artist: **Jamie Hewlett**
Issue: **1**
Price: **£1.95**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

It's funny, considering how much we like *Tank Girl* in this office, that you're about to read two negative reviews in one issue, but there you go. With *TG* co-creator Alan Martin off on holiday in a camper van (or something), Peter Milligan – one of Britain's best writers, with groundbreaking work like *Skin* and *Rogan Josh* to his name – has been drafted in to pen most of her adventures, and bring a sense of narrative structure to the proceedings.

Well, he's certainly done that with *The Odyssey*, which throws Tank Girl, Jet Girl, Booga *et al* into a typically comic-obscene-violent picaresque adventure, but with a more navigable storyline and a few more cultural references than usual.

I'm not quite sure what the problem with all this is – there really shouldn't be one – but somehow it doesn't quite work. Hewlett's art seems more workaday than usual, perhaps, and Milligan's script a bit too smart-arsed for its own good, but for once this is a *Tank Girl* comic that's a chore to read. If this is the sign of things to come, I don't really care if I see the next issue or not. Maybe, like lots of the best bands, it's simply that Tank Girl's run its course, and Hewlett and co really should think about doing something else instead.

C+

Graphic novels

TANK GIRL 2

Dark Horse

Writer: **Alan Martin**
Artist: **Jamie Hewlett**
Price: **£8.99**
Text: **Stuart Campbell**

This is the second collection of the original *Tank Girl* strips from *Deadline* magazine – and after reading through it the movie doesn't actually seem so bad a deal. What you get here for your nine quid is mostly a mish-mash of half-arsed self-indulgent drivel. Worse, Hewlett and Martin appear in about three-quarters of the strips themselves, which is always a sure sign of desperation.

"Summer Love Sensation" suffers the most, the longest story in the book building up stylishly over 30-odd pages only to climax in a(nother) crap comics world in-joke for Alan and Jamie's friends. Tank Girl spends much of the time gratuitously getting her kit off too, that other old and predictable standby for writers who've lost the plot entirely.

Only the Jack Kerouac satire "Blue Helmet" shows a glimmer of the old verve, and only "Fucked-Up Afro Zombie Babes From Nowhere," at one page long, doesn't outstay the welcome generated by its title.

This stuff might have worked in occasional every-other-month flashes in *Deadline* (and, don't get me wrong, the art is as lovely as ever), but collected together and read all at once it's all but insufferable.

And there are no tanks in it, either.

D+

Coming soon

Batman/Judge Dredd: The Ultimate Riddle
DC/Fleetway **June**
Bound to be a top-seller in a Summer of both Bats and JD movies, this third team-up of comics' top hard-men features John Wagner and Alan Grant on words, and *2000AD* favourites Carl Critchlow and Dermot Power on art, with the Riddler as one of the villains. Can't wait!

"Young Dredd"
Fleetway **July**
Launch of a new Dredd comic to tie in with the movie, and apparently entitled simply *Judge Dredd*, features film-inspired artwork and stories aimed at the under-tens, with no killing allowed.

Rian Hughes

Best-selling Comics

X-Comics Back On Top

Marvel's recent messing about with the ***X-Men*** titles (renaming all the comics and setting them in an alternative version of the familiar Marvel universe) is finally over – and now the line is dominating the top of the charts. Of more interest to SFX readers is the heavy SF slant of much of the rest of the chart, though, with Topps' ***X-Files*** continuing to sell well, along with the last issue of the ***Dark Empire 2*** mini-series, the new ***Alien vs Superman*** title (not a fair fight, surely?), and the first issue of ***Sovereign Seven,*** the new title by writer Chris Claremont, the man who more than anyone else should be credited with the on-going popularity of the *X-Men*.

The Forbidden Planet Comic Chart

1 **X-Men** #42 Marvel
2 **Generation X** #5 Marvel
3 **Alien vs Superman** #1 Dark Horse
4 **X-Factor** #112 Marvel
5 **Spawn** #31 Image
6 **Excalibur** #87 Marvel
7 **Gen 13** #2 Image
8 **The X-Files** #5 Topps
9 **Sovereign Seven** #1 DC
10 **Star Wars: Dark Empire 2** #6 Dark Horse

NEW MEDIA Reviews

"The graphics and sounds are stunning, with highly detailed representations of the bridge and crew, gorgeous cut scenes and the actual actors' voices."

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION: A FINAL UNITY

A Star Trek game that's just like the TV series!

Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Price: **£49.99**
Publisher: **MicroProse** ☎ **(0145) 432 6532**

Text: **Andy Butcher**

It's certainly taken its time in coming (a team of 50 people over three years, in fact), but at last the first official *Star Trek: The Next Generation* game has arrived – and to say it's been worth the wait is something of an understatement. It is, quite simply, superb.

The game puts you in complete control of the Enterprise and her crew in what's best described as an "extended episode" of the show. There's a central plot that ties the whole story together, but along the way you're often side-tracked by spacestations in peril, disappearing scientists, orders from Star Fleet and all the usual problems that face the most famous starship in the world. From the moment you start playing, you just know you're in for a treat – the graphics and sound are stunning, with highly detailed representations of the bridge and crew, gorgeous cut scenes and the real voices of all the main characters.

But the real reasons for *A Final Unity's* excellence run deeper than just looks. First, it's a great game in its own right, not just a vehicle for the *Star Trek* licence. True to the nature of the show it's basically an adventure, with most of the action taking pace on the bridge or in Away Team missions. Second, you also have control over navigation, combat, engineering and the main computer, so there's more than enough on offer even if you're not a big fan of adventure games. Most importantly, though, *A Final Unity* manages to perfectly capture the essence of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

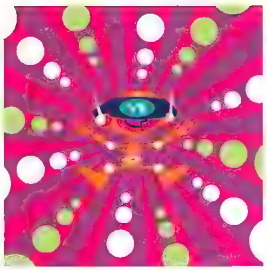
Yes, *you* are in complete control of the Enterprise...

A seemingly friendly Vulcan lends a helping hand...

Obviously the graphics and sound (especially the digitised voices of the cast) help here, but it goes beyond that – a great deal of time and effort has gone into the structure of the game as well. As an example, *A Final Unity* begins in exactly the same way as an episode of the show – an external shot of the Enterprise, with an excerpt from the Captain's Log explaining what's going on, followed by a short scene ending in a dramatic climax and then the credit sequence. This continues throughout the game – such little touches, like the timing of the cut scenes, and the pacing of events, making you feel uncannily like you're taking part in the show.

Star Trek: The Next Generation: A Final Unity isn't just a great game or great *Star Trek*, but a combination of the two that's almost unique in the history of computer games. Whether or not you're a fan of the show, I can't recommend this highly enough.

A+



The month in NEW MEDIA

SF/FANTASY-RELATED COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAMES WARMING A CPU NEAR YOU...

THE DAEDALUS ENCOUNTER

Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Price: **£44.99**
Publisher: **Virgin**
☎ **(0181) 960 2255**
Text: **Andy Butcher**

The futile attempts to make an "interactive movie" on CD-ROM continue unabated with the release of *The Daedalus Encounter*.

An interminable intro sequence details your near-death in a dull space battle, and for the rest of the game your character is nothing more than a brain consigned to a box, which the two supporting actors carry around with them for little apparent reason. In a word, *The Daedalus Encounter* is dull. The "interactive" sections are awful – bad enough to make you glad there are so few of them – and in-between you just sit and watch a poor, clichéd and tacky science fiction story that's a loose rip-off of *Aliens*.

Not even the charms of *Wayne's World's* Tia Carrere are enough to brighten things up. If only more players would buy *Bioforge* (SFX1: A–) or *A Final Unity* instead, then the software companies might take the hint and stop making these damn things.

C-

JUDGE DREDD

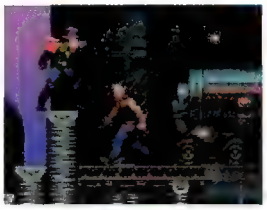
Format: **Mega Drive, Super Nintendo**
Price: **TBA, £44.99**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
☎ **(0171) 3445000**
Text: **Zy Nicholson**

The problem with most film licences is that a tight release schedule often leaves developers with less creative time than usual. The cynical solution? Rehash an older game – in this case, a platformer – and ignore the film entirely... The first clue that Acclaim has done just that comes when you see Dredd, who wears the strip's olive and gold uniform and bears little resemblance to Sly's look.

Fair enough, the refreshing toughness and the run-jump-shoot formula can still entertain on a basic level, but any player worth their salt has already finished a million platform shoot-'em-ups like this before. The real giveaway surfaces when you place Dredd on the edge of a precipice, only to find him teetering comically like *Sonic The Hedgehog*...

The differences between the Mega Drive and SNES versions are minimal, and it's perfectly clear from the workmanlike quality of the game that it's expected to sell purely on the strength of the film tie-in. A poor effort.

D+



***Judge Dredd* on Super Nintendo. Watch out for the Acclaim logo appearing in the film itself!**

PRISONER OF ICE

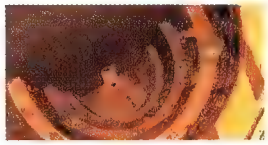
Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Price: **£44.99**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
☎ **(0171) 738 8199**
Text: **Andy Butcher**

This is one of those titles you want to like, but can't because the gameplay won't let you. A secret Nazi base at the South Pole has discovered something nasty in the ice – and it's up to you, as the plucky Lieutenant Ryan, to sort things out.

This is a graphic adventure, controlled entirely with the mouse via a simple point-and-click interface. The graphics and sound are superb, and the plot's intriguing too.

Sadly, the gameplay is incredibly frustrating – there's never any indication as to whether an object is "usable" or not, so you're reduced to moving the mouse across the screen until it registers something and then clicking on it to see if you can use it. Very annoying.

C



***Prisoner of Ice:* Horribly irritating gameplay ruin this great looker.**

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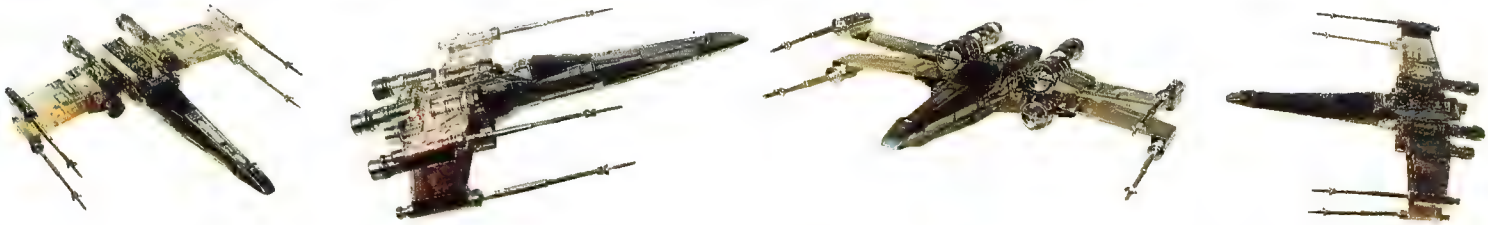
MODEL Reviews

"The four pivoting wings actually work too, so you can display them in either the open or closed position (where they're held together by small studs)."

GOLD X-WING

Get your own gleaming display model of one of the best spaceships ever...



Ran Hughes

Manufacturer: **AMT/Ertl**
Price: **£13.95**
Contact: **Any good toy/model shop**

Text: **Mike Reccia**

One of the best-loved craft from the *Star Wars* movie trilogy has to be the X-Wing, the gutsy single-seater rebel space fighter that appeared in all three films and which featured in pivotal moments with Luke Skywalker as he challenged the might of the evil Empire. As a key craft, the X-Wing was a natural choice for one of MPC's first *Star Wars* kits, way back in 1977. This large (approximately 12" kit) enabled modeller-fans to recreate the gritty, down-and-dirty look of the good guys' brave, but battered, defender.

A couple of years later, a smaller, snap-fix 8" version appeared, offering a simpler model that could be popped together in around an hour by less experienced fingers. The nice thing about this one, though, was that more advanced modellers could still paint it up and dirty it down to produce a convincing replica. This snap-fit kit is now the basis of the latest and most unusual addition to the X-Wing family of models, here re-surfacing as a gold-tone plated limited edition piece.

The pieces come wrapped in foam to prevent damage to their mirrored surfaces, so take care when separating these from the sprues – it's best to use a sharp model knife. Inevitably, small areas will be devoid of plating where sprue and kit part company, but you can easily "mend" these by sparingly applying a little gold enamel paint using a small brush. And despite both box and instructions telling you that glue is required, don't rush out and buy any. All parts snap reassuringly together in a matter of moments, although you do need to line them up properly or you'll break off or misalign the snap-fit lugs (it's virtually impossible to separate located parts once they've been pressed together). The four pivoting wings actually work too, so you can display them in either the open or closed position (where they're held together by small and delicate-looking studs).

The kit looks great plonked on its multi-position transparent stand, but for a more exciting

All the best executives have them: The "gold tone" X-Wing looks good from any angle, as our art bods seem keen to prove...

effect try the following: 1. Invest in a small bottle of black writing ink. 2. Dab a tissue into the ink and smear it liberally over your X-Wing. 3. Immediately wipe the ink off again using a clean tissue. The remaining ink will collect against panel lines and crevices and, once dry, give your model a convincingly antique look.

A rudimentary pilot is included, moulded to the interior of the cockpit, but I chose to paint the inside surfaces of the canopy black, which seems to fit in better with the display concept. Undercarriage skids are also included if you want to add them, but I personally reckon the X-Wing looks far sleeker if these remain in the kit box.

If finished carefully, Ertl's new "gold-tone" limited edition X-wing should appear like one of those expensive desk ornaments you see advertised by the various "Mint" companies – and definitely just the thing for your modeller's "den." For dioramas or realism, though, stick to the standard version, also available from Ertl.

Ertl is also planning to release limited edition gold-tone kits of a Rebel B-Wing fighter (as seen in *Return of the Jedi)* and the Empire's deadly TIE (Twin Ion Engine) Fighter over the next couple of months. Should be good.

The month in TOYS & MODELS

RECENT AND UPCOMING MODEL RELEASES, PLUS A DETAILED GUIDE TO HOT NEW TOYS & MODELS COMING SOON. EDITED BY MIKE RECCIA, EDITOR OF SCI-FI & FANTASY MODELS MAGAZINE.

Coming soon

Mars Attacks
Screamin' **Out now**
Eighth scale vinyl kits and dioramas based on the '50s *War of the Worlds*-inspired American trading card set, popularised by the recent comic. Assorted brain-in-glass-jar aliens terrorise innocent schoolgirls etc.

Star Wars Landspeeder
Kenner **Out now**
Battle damaged, nicely detailed version of Luke's famous car, capable of holding four characters from Kenner's interesting new line in *Star Wars* figures.

Hulk vs Thing; Spider-Man vs Venom bookends
Bowen Designs **Out now**
Nicely-modelled ceramic Marvel hero bookends that cost $175 a set in the US, so they'll set you back a tidy fortune over here.

Recent releases

SUPERIOR STAR TREK COLLECTIBLES

Manufacturer: **Playmates**
Prices: **Various**
Contact: **Bandai UK**
☎ **(01489) 790944**

In the US, *Star Trek* action figures, dolls and playsets are big business, with US company Playmates fully aware that a large percentage of its market consists of mature, serious collectors, eager to preserve anything *Trek*-related.

Action figures are therefore highly realistic and excitingly packaged, presenting good-to-excellent likenesses of their human counterparts in highly detailed outfits. Spacecraft are accurate and highly detailed too, resembling carefully made construction kits more than toys. Collector dolls come in authentic cloth uniforms, with phasers and tricorders, while action figure scaled playsets – such as the Enterprise-D bridge – incorporate lights and sounds. As a bonus, every Playmates *Trek* collectible is individually numbered too, to add to its future value.

In this country, selected figures, spacecraft and playsets are being released in bursts by Bandai UK. Out now, for example, is the feared Borg ship (see Toys & Models last issue), and the Klingon Bird of Prey (£32.99). Both feature authentic sounds, lights and a Starfleet symbol display base. A "battle-damaged" *Generations* version of the Enterprise, with illuminated nacelles, sounds and blow-apart panels with flashing lights and authentic explosion noises, is also being made available.

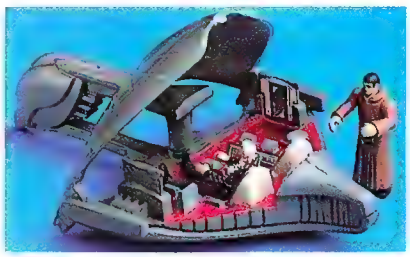
Not a Mini Ship – just a mini picture. This new Bird of Prey makes "authentic" sounds, apparently.

Mini Ships (around £6.99 each) are a new range of tiny, highly detailed replicas of the most popular ships from *Star Trek: TNG*. Each craft opens up to reveal an interior and two articulated mini figures. Bandai's initial line-up comprises a Shuttlecraft, Borg ship, movie Klingon Bird of Prey and a Romulan Warbird, with more to follow.

What will undoubtedly prove the most popular – and hard to find – Trek collectible should be available in limited release now. This is the classic Phaser pistol from the original series, at £18. Bandai's correctly scaled version, with light-up emitter and stun and disintegrate sounds, looks more like an original prop than a toy. If you see one, snap it up – you can't lose out on your investment, and they won't hang around forever.

New blister-packed action figures (£6.99 each) with accessories complete the current batch of releases. If you haven't time to make models, but love *Star Trek*, check them out.

Mind your head! This neat Warbird comes from the new Mini Ships range.



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TOSH Reviews

"Credit must go to Peter Davison and Jon Pertwee for trying to inject some life into the bland scripts (although there should be a hefty tax on Pertwee's attempts at doing Dalek voices)."

SILLY VOICES

A battle of the larynges for the two Doctors

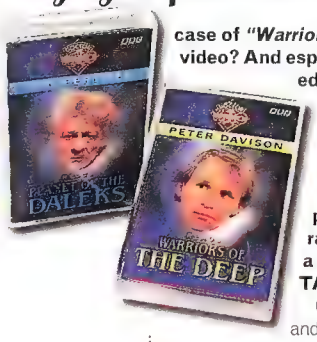
DOCTOR WHO TALKING NOVELS

Jon Pertwee reads "Planet of the Daleks" C-

Peter Davison reads "Warriors of the Deep" D+

Distributor: **BBC Radio**
Price: **£5.99 each**
Release: **Out now**

Text: **Dave Golder**



Aaaaaaaaakkkkk! Kerching! Yep, that's the noise of BBC Enterprises squeezing even more money out of *Doctor Who*. The question is, though, does anybody really want audio cassette versions of *Doctor Who* novelisations? Especially stories that are already (or very soon will be in the case of *"Warriors of the Deep")* available on video? And especially when they're based on edited versions of dodgy Terrance Dicks novels, complete with such literary gems as "a peaceful area... where row upon row of computer banks hummed peacefully" and "Tegan's rainbow-coloured dress added a splash of colour to the TARDIS"?

Credit must go to Peter Davison and Jon Pertwee for trying to inject some life into the bland scripts (although there should be a hefty tax on Pertwee's attempts at doing Daleks). But, despite using music from the original TV stories, these audio versions lack any sense of excitement. It doesn't help that neither story was a classic to begin with.

Still, the audio version of "Warriors of the Deep" has one advantage over the video version – you don't have to watch the Myrka stumbling through rubber doors looking like a green gloss-coated pantomime cow. Small mercies, eh?

BORIS VALLEJO'S 3D MAGIC

Artist: **Boris Vallejo**
Publisher: **Paper Tiger**
Price: **£12.95**
Released: **27 July**
ISBN: **1-85028-365-6**

Text: **Dave Golder**

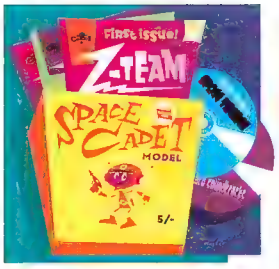
Fed up looking at a load of dots and pretending you can see a woman with huge breasts in glorious 3D? Never fear – stereograms that are actually supposed to look like lots of busty, naked women (before you go cross-eyed, that is) are finally here.

It had to happen, I suppose – *Magic Eye*-style books based on the works of famous fantasy artists. Boris Vallejo is the Peruvian painter who's renowned for his well-endowed fantasy females. And there are plenty of breasts and buttocks on show in this 3D Magic extravaganza – plus loads more waiting to burst out at anyone prepared to put in the retina-wrenching effort.

There are 28 3D images in all, ranging from relatively simple affairs, which look effective enough in 2D (almost Vallejo meets Warhol), to wild, confused masses of naked nubiles which only make sense if you can "see" stereograms.

Some of the 3D images work fine, but others are disappointing. Even when your eyes have "clicked" in, it's difficult to tell what you're supposed to be looking at (we did a quick survey on one of the pictures in the office and four people saw four different things).

Printed on top-quality paper and with a foreword by Vallejo himself, this comes across as little more than a novel marketing ploy, although the end result is attractive enough to plonk comfortably on your coffee table. B



The month in TOSH

(AKA THE BIT WHERE WE STUFF EVERYTHING WE CAN'T PIGEONHOLE.)

TODD MCFARLANE'S SPAWN MODELS: OVERT-KILL

Manufacturer: **Todd Toys (TMP International)**
Distributor: **Hornby Hobbies**
Price: **£11.99**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

Of all the various ranges of action figures out there at the moment – animated *Batman, Star Trek: Generations,* the recent (overpriced) Godzilla set and so on – Todd McFarlane's Spawn figures are just about the best. Not only are they tough, solid and nicely made, but they've just been re-released at new low price points (between £9.99 and £11.99 per figure) thus making them good value too.

This guy – the rather clumsily named and decidedly non-famous Overt-kill – is our Dep Ed's favourite. He comes with a free *Spawn* mini-comic book (fairly poor, to be honest, though it does explain that Overt-kill is "more machine than man, a tin soldier in the mafia's brutal war on law and order"), a parking meter weapon, and the rather self-defeating super-power that his "head launches from body."

We had about, ooh, 30 seconds of fun firing the head at each other, but seeing as it only travels about four inches interest soon waned.

Still, he looks quite nice sitting on top of my tired old Mac... C+

MIGHTY MORPHIN' POWER RANGERS SPIN POP CANDY

Distributor: **Toy Options Ltd**
Price: **£1.99**
Release: **Out now**
Text: **Dave Golder**

This has to be the ultimate in laziness. Or possibly, with a few amendments, the ultimate in kinkiness. Take your pick. Basically, what we have here is lolly-spinning device. Stick the lolly in your mouth, wrap tongue around lolly, press the button on the shaft and experience a tactile taste sensation.

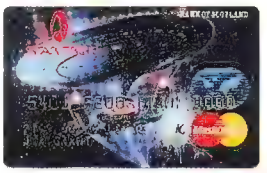
Quite what all this has to do with the *Power Rangers* is unclear. They seem to have missed the opportunity to colour-code the flavours, so the Yellow Ranger would have lemon lollies, the Blue Ranger blueberry lollies, and so on. Or perhaps I'm just taking this all a bit too seriously.

Lollies and batteries need replacing from time to time, although, unlike *Power Rangers* plots, the two are not interchangeable. C+

STAR TREK CREDIT CARD

Bank of Scotland

Release: **Out now**
Text: **Dave Golder**



The Bank of Scotland goes where no bank has gone before by launching the first *Star Trek* credit card in the UK. Featuring *The Next Generation* flavour of USS Enterprise, the card is just the right size for cleaning out the gunge between the tiles in your bathroom, and is great for opening locked doors. You can also actually use it to buy things.

In fact, the card is an impressively snazzy affair. There's no charge for the first 12 months, then the account costs £7.50 per annum unless you spend over £2,000 in that time. Then again you could always cancel the account and frame the card instead. Cal ☎ **(0800) 716097** for details. B+

WIN! WIN! WIN!
CASPER, TREK, BOND & ROBBY GOODIES!

SCIENCE FICTION MERCHANDISE, EH? YOU CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF IT, WHICH IS WHY WE'RE CHUCKING LOADS OF NIFTY SF BITS & PIECES YOUR WAY IN THIS MONTH'S BUMPER COMPETITIONS.

Spooksome T-shirt Compo

No self-respecting fan of big-budget-films-based-on-dodgy-'50s-cartoons can afford to be without the latest fashion craze: The *Casper* T-shirt. So to celebrate the release of the new movie (reviewed on page 74), starring the lovely Christina Ricci, we're giving away 25 of these garments, courtesy of MCA Marketing. To be in with a chance of winning, tell us the name of the film that Christina Ricci made with Cher. The first 25 correct entries drawn will win the T-shirts.

Mark your entry Spooksome T-shirt Compo.

Undiscovered Country* Compo

Gene Roddenberry, alas, is no longer with us. But before he died he invited Yvonne Fern to record for posterity his views on life, the universe and everything. HarperCollins has just published these final conversations as *Inside the Mind of Gene Roddenberry*, and generously sent us ten copies to give away this month. To win one, simply tell us Gene Roddenberry's middle name. The first ten correct entries drawn will win the books.

Mark your entry Undiscovered Country Compo.

*(*SFX literary editor N Molesworth writes: "This refurs to deth, not the future, as any fule no, exsept the riters of Star Trec VI, who wood scorn 0 in eng.lit., chiz chiz.")*

Mega-rare Prototype James Bond Compo

For years, TV fans dreamed of seeing the legendary "lost" '50s TV version of *Casino Royale*, starring Barry Nelson and Peter Lorre. Well, now they need dream no longer, because we've got this very show, plus two volumes' worth of classic anthology series *One Step Beyond* (Vols 1 and 2) and some stylish T-shirts to give away, courtesy of the groovy folk at Retro Video. 15 lucky people can win the above bundle of goodies by simply telling us the name of the black comedy in which Peter Lorre played Dr Einstein? The first 15 correct entries drawn will win the prizes.

Mark your entry Mega-rare Prototype James Bond Compo.

Coolest Robot Ever Compo

Robby the Robot from *Forbidden Planet* is the coolest robot in cinematic history. Now you can own a copy of this SF milestone (replete with original trailer), along with Michael Crichton's android-cowboy classic *Westworld* and the Director's Cut of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (replete with gratuitous shot of unicorn, and no dodgy Chandler-esque narration), thanks to Warner Home Video and SFX. All the films are in Widescreen format, and Warner has kindly given us three copies of each to give away. To win the trio of vids, tell us the name of the 1957 film in which Robby the Robot also starred. The first three correct entries drawn will win.

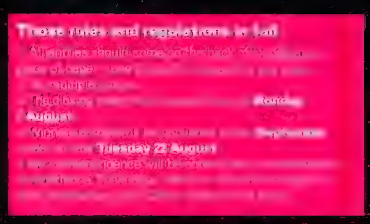
Mark your entry Coolest Robot Ever Compo.

Literature, Jim, But Not As We Know It Compo

William Shatner truly is a renaissance man: He acts (sort of), he directs (ahem) *and* he writes novels. Fresh from his success with the *Tek* series of books, Bill Shatner has now penned his first *Star Trek* novel – *The Ashes of Eden* (see review last issue), albeit with a little help from Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens. We have 20 hardback copies to give away this month, thanks to Simon & Schuster. To get your hands on one, just tell us on which US comedy show did Shatner famously take the mickey out of *Star Trek* fans?

Send all your competition entries to:

[Compo name]
SFX
30 Monmouth Street
Bath, Avon
BA1 2BW



BABCOM '95

Birmingham NEC, 29-30 April

Great guests, impressive presentation, but **Dave Golder** found little atmosphere at Britain's first ever Babylon 5 convention.

Babcom '95 certainly looked like it had had a lot of money spent on it. But despite the brilliant stage, laser lights and dry ice, and two massive halls at Birmingham's NEC, there was something missing. And I'm not just talking about the bar...

Stargazer Productions, organisers of the show, seem to have been victims of their own success. At the end of last year they held a massive *Star Trek* con at the Albert Hall. It was Britain's first professional affair – in other words, organised by full-time convention organisers rather than an extended committee of fans – and drew in over 10,000 people over one weekend from all over Europe. It was naturally considered a huge success.

Repeating the trick has been difficult, however, not least because there's nothing much out there – not even *Doctor Who* or *Star Wars* – that can equal the pulling power of *Trek*. *Babylon 5* is a good show, and a favourite with fans, but it's not quite a 27 year old phenomenon just yet. It simply doesn't have a sufficiently large fan base. And, let's face it, Bulgarian devotees are *not* going to travel to Birmingham to see Peter (Ambassador Londo) Jurasik's make-up being applied, however interesting that may be. The unsurprising result was that the place was always half empty. It was a bit like getting Shed Seven to play at Wembley – no matter how good the performance, with only a few hundred fans things are always going to fall flat.

What made this emptiness a real shame, though, was that all the guests were really excellent. Producer JM Straczynski displayed a deep love of UK telefantasy, citing *The Prisoner* and *Blake's 7* as influences on *Babylon 5*, and dropped enough vague hints about the future of the show to keep the audience hungry for more. Peter Jurasik was turned into Londo on stage by Optic Nerve, the make-up team from the show, who also answered questions from the audience. Then Jurasik himself went into character to do his session, which kept returning to the subject of alien tentacles (it's not the size but the quantity that counts, apparently) and what G'Kar keeps inside his cod-piece. All good stuff, and rather like a *Carry On...* film at times. Claudia Christian (Commander Ivanov) completed the line-up, which was one short thanks to the absence of Danny John Jules. Although what Cat from *Red Dwarf* has to do with *Babylon 5* was never made clear...

Claudia Christian and Peter Jurasik (below-left) headed a great set of guests.

The main problem was that the event looked more like an exhibition than a convention. The social side was virtually non-existent, and there was certainly no mingling with the "stars" to speak of – the absence of a bar didn't help on this front. And then the shortage of stands in the dealer hall meant there wasn't much to do during the long lunchbreak either, unless you wanted to queue for 90 minutes for an autograph (and I wasn't particularly keen on doing that)...

Stargazer Productions clearly have some tough lessons to learn from this experience. Next time round, the organisers need to be more realistic in their choice of venue. Birmingham NEC is impressive, sure, but it meant ridiculously high ticket prices for this kind of event (over £20, in fact, although there were some drastic last-minute price-cuts available at the door), and a restriction in the number of dealers who could afford stands.

Size, as Peter Jurasik might say, isn't everything...

Quote of the con

"I would keep rushing over to touch up Peter."

Make-up man **John Vulich** on why he'd never appear as an extra...

FANTASTIC DAYS

Dates for your diary

Introducing SFX's monthly updated listing of forthcoming SF conventions. All cons are non-profit-making events organised by fans, unless otherwise stated. Please enclose an SAE to the appropriate address with all enquiries, and remember – registration rates may rise nearer the event. (Con-organisers, if your listing is wrong, or your con isn't mentioned, please send full details to Live!, SFX, 30 Monmouth St, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW.)

15-17 July 1995
Conundrum: 5th Scottish *Star Trek* Convention Hospitality Inn, Glasgow; £35. Write to: **PO Box 1598, Ruther-glen, Glasgow G73 4HS.**

23 July 1995
Minami Con Japanese anime con in Southern England, at Hilton National, Portsmouth. Details from **Mark Cleaver, 15 New Road, Fair Oak, Eastleigh, Hamps SO50 8EN.**

29 July 1995
Brand-X *The X-Files* minicon at Mountbatten Hotel, Leicester Square, London. Tickets cost £9. Write to: **338 Blackfen Rd, Sidcup, Kent DA15 9NY.**

29 July 1995
Klingon Festival Local *Trek* group USS Pegasus organise activities at The Clansman, Hartlepool Shopping Centre. Tickets cost £8 from **Mr & Mrs A Doyle, 115 Macaulay Road, Hartlepool, Cleveland TS25 4NF.**

11-13 August 1995
Nexus 95 Bristol Star Fleet Registry and Bristol Astronomical Society presents a *Star*

FANTASTIC CINEMA

THE 5TH DERBY FILM FESTIVAL

DERBY, 5-14 MAY, AND THE CINEMAS ARE PUTTING ON A SHOW... **MJ SIMPSON** IS VERY IMPRESSED.

A combination of premières, archive screenings and special guests made this the second most successful outing in the festival's five-year history. Recent movies such as *Star Trek: Generations, In the Mouth of Madness* and *The Mangler* mixed with classics like Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* and Boris Karloff's *Frankenstein*. Ingrid Pitt's appearance at a Hammer double-bill of *The Vampire Lovers* and *She* was a particular highlight.

Animation devotees were also well catered for, with screenings of various Manga movies and a well-attended evening of Aardman animation. The week's events concluded with two special guest appearances: Derbyshire-born Tim Brooke-Taylor drew an appreciative crowd of *Goodies* fanatics, while local *Who*-vians turned out in force for Jon Pertwee.

Robert Englund: Pressing people in *The Mangler*.

Although audiences for some of the more obscure films were small, those who did turn up were always very appreciative. An opportunity to see Fritz Lang's silent classic *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler,* for example – with live accompaniment, no less! – was too rare an opportunity for some to miss. The festival organisers, and backers Derby City Council, are to be congratulated on providing such a varied and interesting programme.

***In the Mouth of Madness* – in Derby, in May!**

Next year's festival will coincide with the centenary opening of Derby's very first cinema.

Trek/SF con at Holiday Inn, Crowne Plaza, Bristol. Tickets cost £35. Write to: **26 Milner Rd, Bristol.**

24-28 August 1995
Intersection: 53rd World Science Fiction Convention
This is the big one! Hundreds of SF notables present. £80 for all five days from **Admail 336, Glasgow G2 1BR.**

1-3 September 1995
Lightspeed '95
Star Trek con at Hilton International Hotel, Leeds. Write to **Lightspeed Conventions, 16 Bramwell St, Eastwood, Rotherham, South Yorks S65 1RZ.**

2-3 Sept 1995
Ne'a'driar
West Middlesex *Star Trek Group* con, held at Shepperton Moat House Hotel. Details from **John Foxley, 143 Northumberland Rd, North Harrow, HA2 7RB.**

15-18 Sept 1995
Wolf 359 – The Gathering
Star Trek/*Babylon 5* convention at Sachas Hotel, Manchester. Tickets cost £35. Write to: **Margo White, 37 Branksome Road, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS2 4HG.**

22-24 Sept 1995
6th Festival of Fantastic Films
Manchester's annual filmfest. Write to: **95 Meadowgate Road, Salford, M6 8EN.**

6-8 October 1995
Midcon 14
Star Trek con at Holiday Inn Hotel, Leicester. Tickets cost £33. Write to: **8 Ennerdale Close, Oadby, Leicester LE2 4TN.**

27-29 October 1995
Phoenix
Apollo Hotel, Birmingham hosts an SF media con. Details from **112 The Normans, Wexham, Slough SL2 5TU.**

27-30 October 1995
Cult TV
Haven All-Action Centre, Caister, Great Yarmouth. Tickets cost £39. Write to: **PO Box 1701, Peterborough PE1 1EX.**

3-5 November 1995
Novacon 25
UK's longest-running annual SF con at Chamberlain Hotel, Birmingham. Details from **Carol Morton, 14 Park St, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY9 8SS.**

18-19 November 1995
Assimilation
Star Trek con at Friendly Hotel, Milton Keynes. Tickets cost £20. Write to: **Stuart Banks, 77 Holyrood Ave, South Harrow, Middl'x HA2 8UD.**

2-4 February 1996
Starbase 96
Star Trek con at Hilton National Hotel, Leeds. Tickets cost £40. Write to: **Carol Looby, 152 Otley Road, Headingly, Leeds LS16 5JX.**

10-11 February 1996
Star Fleet Ball
Trek fancy dress event at Royal Bath Hotel, Bournemouth. Tickets cost £35. Write to: **Anne Lindup, Five Elms, Holtwood, Dorset BH21 7DT.**

29-31 March 1996
48 Hours in Space
Non-stop SF TV marathon at Comfort Friendly Inn, Hull. Tickets cost £25. Write to: **PO Box 1701, Hull HU4 7YU.**

5-8 April 1996
Evolution – 47th British National SF Convention
Next year's Eastercon at the Radisson Edwardian, Heathrow. Tickets cost £24. Write to: **13 Lindfield Gdns, Hampstead, London NW3 6PX.**

12-14 April 1996
Accelerate 96
UK *Quantum Leap* con at the Radisson Edwardian, Heathrow. Write to: **78 Sterry Road, Dagenham, Essex RM10 8NT**

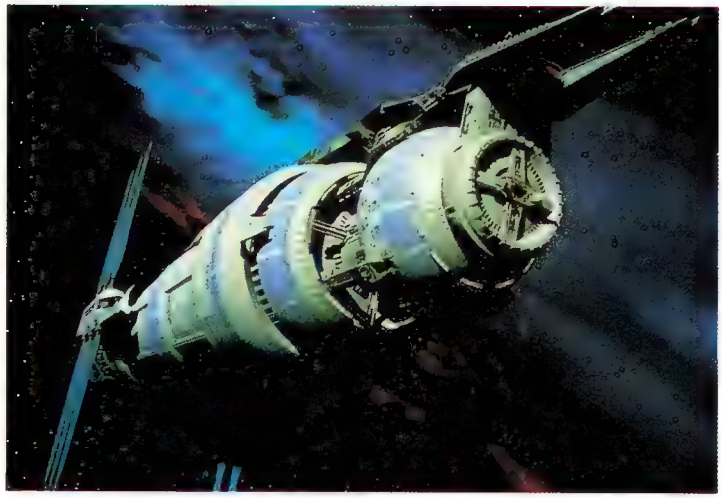
2-6 May 1996
Warp Two: 41st British *Star Trek* Convention
Major *Trek* con at Cardiff International Arena. Tickets cost £35. Write to: **David Simons, Warp Two, 69 Merlin Crescent, Edgware, Midd'x HA8 6JB.**

24-27 May 1996
Inconsequential V – Inconsistent
Third SF humour con at Scotch Corner Hotel, Darlington. Tickets cost £22. Write to: **Flat 1, 31 Saxon Road, South Norwood, London SE25 5EQ.**

23-26 August 1996
Concorde: 42nd British *Star Trek* Convention
Major *Trek* bash at the Radisson Edwardian. £30 tickets. Write to: **138 Crosslands, Stantonbury, Milton Keynes MK14 6DF.**

30 DAYS INTO THE FUTURE...

Coming next month in SFX



BABYLON 5

Last month, we promised you something on *Babylon 5.* Don't worry – we haven't forgotten about what's probably the most well thought through bit of TV science fiction ever. Not a bit of it. The feature just grew so big, we decided to go to town on it next month, when you can expect an interview with JM Straczynski, chats with the cast, a look at special effects and more. Honest.

GOLDENEYE

It may have escaped your attention, but there's a James Bond film shooting in this country at the moment, with a new James Bond, a new (female) "M," the introduction of 006, and assorted fantastic, very definitely SF (or at least fantasy) elements, including some lovely model work from a certain Mr Derek Meddings. We thought it was about time we took a look at it...

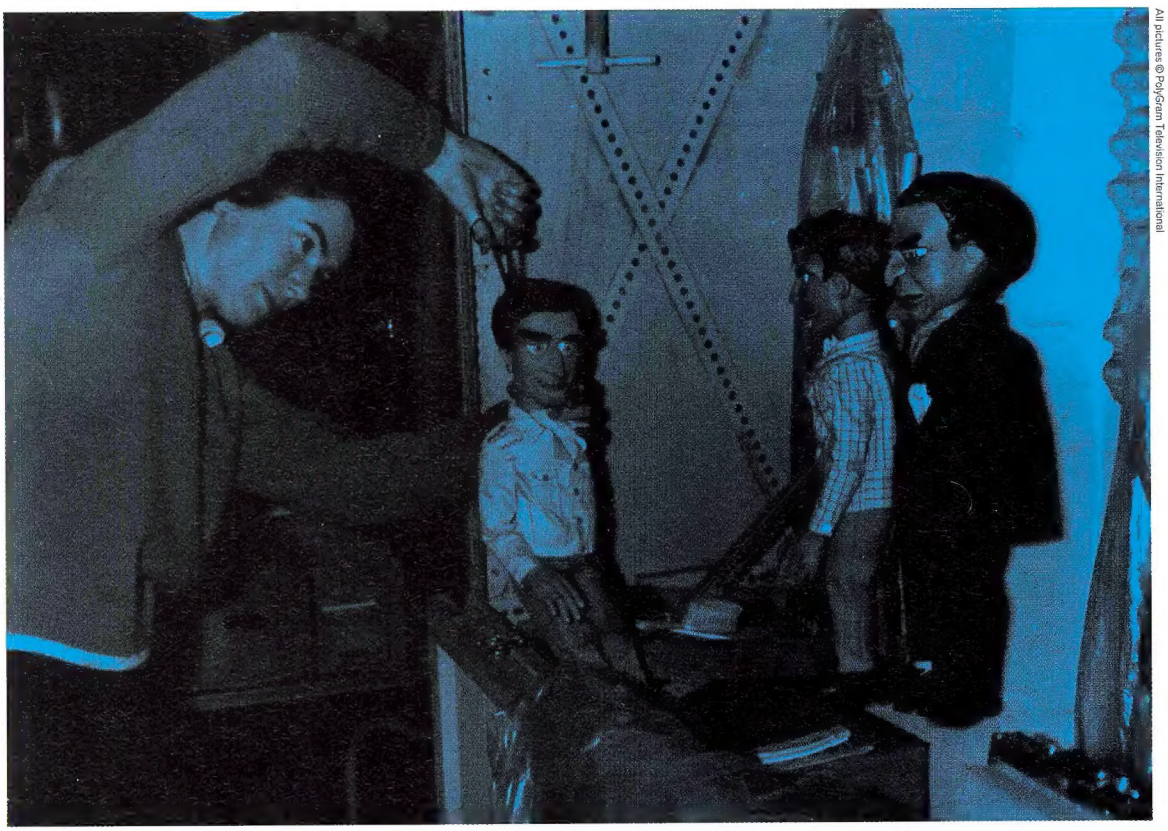
PLUS!

Batman Forever, Harry Harrison, and lots, lots more...
It's getting better and better all the time...

SFX3: ON SALE TUESDAY 25 JULY. JOIN US!

CLASSIC GERRY ANDERSON

BACK, BACK, BACK IN TIME WE GO FOR THESE CLASSIC SUPERMARIONATION RARITIES.
WITH THANKS TO **RALPH TITTERTON.**



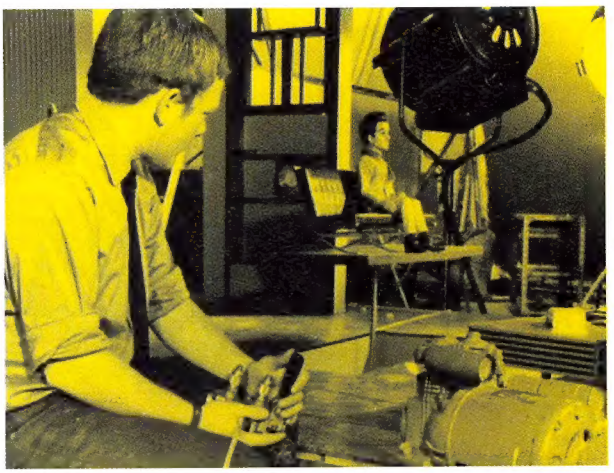
All pictures © PolyGram Television International

STINGRAY

Producer: **Gerry Anderson**
Special effects: **Derek Meddings** and **Reg Hill**
First aired: **4 October 1964**

Top: Derek Meddings and colleague ready the "atomic-powered" Stingray model for a tank shot.

Above: The beautiful Atlanta – WASP boss Commander Sam Shore's daughter and ardent admirer of Troy Tempest – is readied for a Marineville Control Tower scene.



SUPERCAR

Producer: **Gerry Anderson**
Special effects: **Derek Meddings**
First aired: **28 January 1961**

Above: Supercar pilot Mike Mercury receives a quick haircut.

THUNDERBIRDS

Producer: **Reg Hill**
Executive producer: **Gerry Anderson**
Special effects supervisor: **Derek Meddings**
First aired: **2 October 1965**

Left: Shooting a scene with the Scott Tracy marionette. In case you haven't seen this sequence, the couch descends on a pole and deposits its passenger in Thunderbird 3.

SPACE ADVENTURE COBRA

Original Concept & Story
By BUICHI TERASAWA

With Music Written & Performed by YELLO

"A psychedelic manga version of Star Wars" **THE GUARDIAN**

"A rip-roaring space epic" **TIME OUT**

"A superb new soundtrack of Yello hits" **MELODY MAKER**

"Excellent animation and the best Japanese anime soundtrack ever!" **CABLE TIMES**

"A fast and furious actionfest" **WHAT'S ON**

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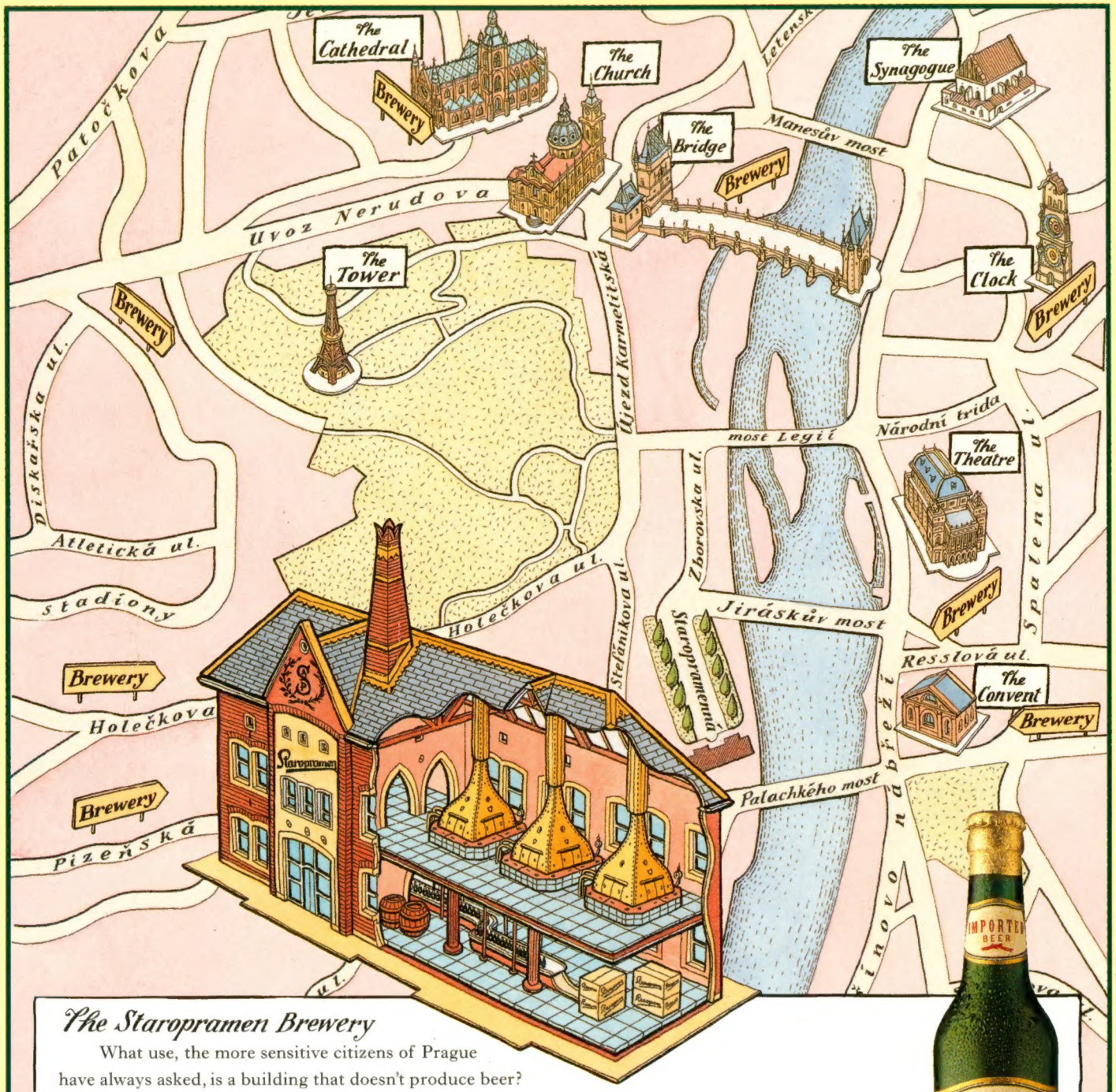
THE Real GUIDE TO PRAGUE

No. 1 THE OLD QUARTER



The Staropramen Brewery

What use, the more sensitive citizens of Prague have always asked, is a building that doesn't produce beer?

And nowhere is this passion for great architecture more apparent than in the Old Quarter, where you'll find the Staropramen Brewery. Rising proudly from a tiresome clutter of Baroque cathedrals and Neoclassical churches, this magnificent brick edifice has several windows, a big door and a roof literally covered with tiles. Using the softest water in Europe, it is the sole source of the best loved brew in Prague, a city which drinks more beer than any other in the world. It keeps them waiting 70 thirsty days for Staropramen to mature, but the result is a unique, full-bodied beer which encourages interest in those other architectural jewels in Prague's crown. The buildings where you can drink the stuff.

Staropramen

Ochranná známka

The Heart of Prague

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